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EDITORIAL

SUSAN WATKINS

A Weightless Hegemony

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FREDRIC JAMESON: The Politics of Utopia

Between the dizzying technologies of the First World, and social disintegrations of the Third, does the concept of utopia still possess a meaning? Fredric Jameson on the resistant negations of fantasy-based systemic critique.

ROBERT BRENNER: New Boom or New Bubble?

The shape of the US economy as it emerges from recession, in election year. With the giant manufacturing sector still crippled by over-capacity, can the take-off be sustained by bubble-driven finance, retail and construction booms?

SVEN LÜTTICKEN: Planet of the Remakes

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Editorial

A WEIGHTLESS HEGEMONY

New Labour's Role in the Neoliberal Order

THE CENTRE LEFT governments that dominated the North Atlantic zone up to the turn of the millennium have now all but disappeared. Within six months of Bush's victory in the United States, the Olive Tree coalition had crumbled before Berlusconi's Forza Italia. The autumn of 2001 saw Social Democrats driven from office in Norway and Denmark. In April 2002 Kok's Labour-led government resigned over a report pointing to Dutch troops' complicity in the Srebrenica massacre. The following month, Jospin came in a humiliating third behind Chirac and Le Pen in the French presidential contest, and the Right triumphed in the legislative elections. In Germany, the SPD-Green coalition clung on by a whisker, aided by providential floods. Though the SAP retains its historic grip on Sweden it now lacks an absolute majority, and Persson was trounced in the 2003 campaign for euro entry. In Greece, where PASOK has only been out of power for three years since 1981, Simitis squeaked back in 2000 with a 43.8 to 42.7 per cent lead.

Within this landscape, Britain has been the conspicuous exception. In the United Kingdom alone a Centre Left government remains firmly in place, its grip on power strengthened, if anything, in its second term of office, and still enjoying a wide margin of electoral advantage. Both features—New Labour's survival against the general turn of the political wheel, and the scale of its domestic predominance—set it apart within the OECD zone. Elsewhere, although administrations have shifted

from Centre Left to Centre Right, party voting blocs have remained relatively stable—only a point or so off 50:50 in the us, for example. In Britain, counter-cyclically, a much more drastic shift in fortunes has occurred. Blair's successive parliamentary landslides, in 1997 and 2001, have produced the largest Commons majorities in postwar history, the second returning 413 Labour MPs to 166 Conservatives and 52 Liberal Democrats. Even with the uk bogged down in the occupation of Iraq, New Labour looks set to win an unprecedented third term of office in 2005.

The British exception poses three interconnected questions which need to be considered within a comparative, international context. What are the reasons for the stability of Blair's regime? How should the record of New Labour in office be assessed? Where ought the logic of political opposition to it lie?

Blair's unprecedented parliamentary majorities need first to be decoded, for the underlying electoral geography looks rather different. In absolute terms, Labour's popular vote of 10.7 million in 2001 was well down even on the 11.5 million that saw Kinnock defeated in 1992. Fewer than one voter in four (24 per cent of the total electorate) actually marked a cross for Blair's government, while turnout fell from a (then) record low of 71 per cent in 1997 to a mere 59 per cent in 2001.¹ Unrepresented in parliament are the 2.8 million Labour abstentions in Britain's former industrial heartlands—the metropolitan conurbations of Tyne and Wear, Manchester, Merseyside, the West Midlands, Clydeside and South Wales. It was the hard-core Labour vote that stayed at home: whites in the old colliery districts, Asians in the Lancashire inner cities, under-25s in particular. Turnout fell below 44 per cent in the blighted constituencies round the Tyneside shipyards, the bleak Glaswegian council estates and the semi-derelict terraces of Salford and central Leeds; below 35 per cent in the ruined zones of Liverpool's docklands.² Measured in terms of working-class disenfranchisement, the Americanization of British politics has accelerated dramatically under New Labour, to abstention levels worthy of the us itself.

¹ Even in 1997, a scant 30.9 per cent of the total electorate voted New Labour. The 13.5 million ballots that made up Blair's first 'landslide' compare poorly to the 14 million with which Major scraped back in 1992. See David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 2001*, London 2002.

² Social realities hard to square with Ferdinand Mount's claim that the electorate was too happy to vote: *Times Literary Supplement*, 15 June 2001.

Blair's massive majorities, then, have been the product not of voter enthusiasm but of a winner-takes-all electoral system, which has luridly distorted one of the most striking events in current British politics—the collapse of the Conservatives, the country's historic party of government. For if New Labour's support has been weak, the Tory vote has crashed: from a respectable 14 million in 1992, to 9.6 million in 1997, to a mere 8.3 million in 2001. In all the major urban centres, the new Middle England that was Thatcher's dream—non-unionized, service-sector owner-occupiers—has abandoned her party, either voting Labour or staying at home. The Conservatives retain only two seats out of 23 in Inner London; one of 25 in Greater Manchester; none in the urban Merseyside or Tyne and Wear regions.³ They have been virtually banished from the Celtic periphery, with a single seat in Scotland, none in Wales. Their current 166 MPs are returned largely from the Tory heartlands, the shires and southern suburbs. Nowhere else in Europe has a governmental party of the Right undergone such a fall. It is this debacle that has been the precondition for the past seven years of New Labour's uncontested rule—its weightless hegemony.

Decline and its solutions

Behind this role reversal in the political system lie the social and economic changes wrought by two decades of full-tilt neoliberal reform. Historically, the roots of Conservative dominance can be traced to the peculiar configuration of English capital as it emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when a landed aristocracy, undergirded by a wealthy, London-based merchant layer, became Europe's premier capitalist class and commander of an expanding overseas empire. The northern industrial manufacturers, coming into their own during the very decades when property-owning England froze at the spectre of revolution across the Channel, sought not to challenge this landowner-led bloc but to join its ranks. The capitalist-aristocracy's state—the sovereign crown-in-parliament at its core—was preserved in all its archaic essentials down to the end of the nineteenth century, accumulating an increasingly powerful array of hegemonic institutions: Crown and Dominions, Whitehall and Westminster, the City, law courts and armed services, universities and public schools. It proved fully capable of

³ The only exception was the Dagenham–Barking area of South Essex, which saw a 5.9 swing to the Conservatives.

absorbing the impact of universal suffrage. Consistent with the internal logic of this established order, it was the Conservatives, with their resolutely imperial and landed background, rather than the Liberals, more closely linked to towns and industry, that emerged as the unitary party of capital necessitated by the first-past-the-post system, once the working class had achieved its own representation with the birth of Labour. Masters of the national statecraft, the Conservatives were, for most of the twentieth century, the natural political voice of the Establishment.

By the 1960s this hegemonic bloc had presided, with brief Labour interludes, over nearly a century of decline from Britain's imperial zenith. The 'audit' of the Second World War had revealed a creaking and outmoded manufacturing base, archaized through lack of investment, while the City, with Bank of England and Treasury support, sought higher returns abroad. Lend-Lease locked the UK into propitiatory debt dependence on Washington. For a decade or more after 1945 the extent of the slippage was masked, as the slow rebuilding of war-shattered economies in Europe and Japan allowed Britain to bask in relative superiority, while Churchill fought to cling on to the remains of empire. Elsewhere, old elites were destroyed and renewed in the fires of war and US occupation; here the traditional order, propped up by victory, continued to preside. Finally in the 1960s with the colonies all but gone and the new challenge of the European Community on the horizon, the symptoms of stagnation became impossible to ignore.

Four attempts at modernization followed over the next fifteen years, united in their assault on organized labour. Politically limited compared to its Continental equivalents, the British trade-union movement possessed a toughness and cultural cohesion within the UK's entrenched industrial class system that gave it a strong say in determining shop-floor working practice. Wilson's 'In Place of Strife'—trading a curtailment of union rights for a say in 'white-heat' technological and corporate developments—failed to win the support of his own party. After 1970, Heath's Selsdon Park strategy—EEC entry, plus fiscal stimulus and a crackdown on organized labour—ran into intransigent trade-union opposition. The Labour government returned in 1974 again targeted the unions as principal cause of unemployment and inflation, and pioneered—in an advanced country—the IMF's restructuring programme. Callaghan's spending cuts devastated the lowest-paid public-sector workers; their defiance, and the backlash against it, restored the Tories to power.

Finally, with Thatcher, modernization was executed with a vengeance. Unemployment was coldly held above three million for a decade while the Conservatives pushed through a breakneck programme of social re-engineering that crushed union resistance, deregulated financial services, and privatized public utilities and council flats to create a new mass layer of small investors and owner-occupiers. With the exception of the defence industry—where ‘British jobs’ remained precious—manufacturing was left to twist in the wind. This was finance capital’s solution.

Marketizing the establishment

But to effect such changes involved an ideological onslaught not only against trade unionists and national utilities but the civil service, universities, BBC—in the end, against the whole Establishment ethos of public service, class deference and cultural distinction upon which the Conservatives’ political hegemony itself had for so long been based. Thatcher preserved the traditional institutions of the *ancien régime* but her assault drained them of legitimacy. The logic inevitably made itself felt within her own party. The grandes who, under the old class-command system, held sway over strategic policy and leadership decisions, loyally supported by a middle-class base, were now supplanted by more combative, petty-bourgeois and *nouveau riche* layers, closer in ideological terms to Poujadism than to the high Tory tradition. The Conservative Party fell victim to its own success.

Given a battery-charging spell in opposition after Thatcher’s dispatch, a pragmatic Conservative leadership—Clarke, Patten, Heseltine, Hurd—might conceivably have forged a working consensus over European monetary and political union, though the Maastricht Treaty would inevitably have been a traumatic moment for the party of empire. Counterfactually, Labour would then have been left to manage the 1992 Black Wednesday fallout that resulted from Lawson locking an over-valued pound into the Exchange Rate Mechanism. But Labour’s fiasco under Kinnock in 1992 kept Major in power. The internal crisis of Conservatism exploded with the party still in office, as Eurosceptic Cabinet factions rebelled against Major over Maastricht.

The pragmatism of the traditional Conservative elite was largely eclipsed by this new layer after the electoral defeat of 1997, divorcing the party from the interests of the City and multinationals. The downward

sociological spiral was given a further twist in 1998 by a party constitution that gave the hitherto powerless members of local Constituency Associations—average age, 62; most are country dwellers—the right to elect the Conservative leader. The result was the rejection of credible national politicians in favour of Iain Duncan Smith, a strutting clown incapable of landing a single parliamentary blow on Blair, despite the government's difficulties in Iraq. Finally in October 2003, following humiliating defeat in a London by-election, Central Office apparatchiks prompted a backbench coup, denying the Party membership their lethal ballot. That today Michael Howard—reviled during his time as Home Secretary in the 1990s—should be hailed as a saviour of the party, is itself a measure of the depths of the Conservative crisis.

The consolidators

Entering office in 1997, New Labour were heirs to a social landscape transformed by Thatcherism. In the City, the industrial-scale architecture of the deregulated financial companies dwarfed the toy-town remnants of gentlemanly capitalism. Suburban infill had spread across southern England. Silicon and pharmaceutical firms, funded by Japanese and American capital, sprouted along the M4 corridor southwest from London and Reading. Terraced streets in the old textile towns stood boarded up; iron and steelworks had been ploughed to rubble. Eminently successful as a transfer of class wealth and power, Thatcherite modernization had fallen manifestly short as a solution to long-term problems of productivity and investment. Many of the cash-starved utilities had foundered in private hands. Schools and hospitals continued to deteriorate. Railway privatization proved a disaster.

From the start, however, New Labour was pledged to consolidate the Thatcherite paradigm rather than create a new model. Its charter statement, *The Blair Revolution*, displayed an awestruck respect for her achievements. At the Treasury, Brown would aim for fiscal-surplus levels usually only demanded of the Third World, to be ameliorated by a few low-cost anti-poverty measures. On constitutional change, 'steady, piecemeal reform' was in order. The criminal-justice system would be toughened to increase the likelihood of conviction. On Europe, disdaining Tory 'neoliberalism in one country', New Labour would advance the free-market programme across the Continent. Any moves towards an autonomous federal bloc, centred round France and a

reunified Germany, would be thwarted through unwieldy EU enlargement and constitutional insistence on intergovernmental mechanisms. A London–Paris–Bonn/Berlin axis would ensure that European military expansion was locked, through NATO, behind US leadership.⁴ On defence Blair pledged: 'Yes, I would push the nuclear button'. The Shadow Cabinet was whipped to produce unanimous support for Clinton and Major's September 1996 air strikes on Iraq.⁵ Although New Labour's social-democratic supporters have not ceased to hope that the government will see the light and turn to policies of social redistribution, the leadership has never given them grounds for such illusions. The programme for the bellicose, vehemently neoliberal entity that Blairite Britain would become was largely laid out in advance. As New Labour enters its eighth year in office, what have been the results?

Sustaining growth

On the economic front, Clarke and Major had already nursed recovery from the two-year recession that ended the Thatcher–Lawson boom. From 1993, when sterling's low valuation following ejection from the ERM helped lift exports, growth rates began to revive. By 1995, Major could boast the lowest inflation and highest growth and employment figures in the EU. The finance bubble initially pumped by the Federal Reserve's interest rate rises that year sent the London Stock Market soaring. In the City, brokerage fees and commissions in foreign-exchange, insurance and financial markets rocketed. Deregulation, low labour costs and a world language had made the UK the most inviting port of entry for foreign capital to the European Single Market. From 1996 the pound began to strengthen along with the rising dollar, benefiting from uncertainties over the coming euro. Import prices fell, and house values began to surge again. Employment rates rose, with the strong growth of the service sector—hairdressers, coffee shops, garden centres, retail outlets. Generous tax-breaks on equity-based accounts lured small savers into the stock market. Household debt took off, and the UK began to experience its own provincial version of the imperial bubble.

⁴ Peter Mandelson and Roger Liddle, *The Blair Revolution*, London 1996, pp. 82–3, 29, 210, 240, 164–175; Britain's role in bringing labour flexibility, deregulation and downward tax competition to Europe is enthusiastically reiterated in Gordon Brown, 'Economics vs Dogma', *Wall Street Journal*, 28 May 2003.

⁵ John Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, London 2003, pp. 5, 21.

New Labour was thus presented with a consolidated four-year expansion. The party's most substantial boast is that it has efficiently husbanded the same trends forward. GDP growth averaged a respectable 2.4 per cent between 1997 and 2002, if somewhat down from the 3.2 per cent of the previous five years. With poorer ICT investment in the 1990s, the UK has suffered less fallout from the post-2000 collapse in that sector than the United States. Days lost in strikes have fallen from 27 million in 1984, through an annual average of 620,000 under Major, to a record annual low of 368,000 during Labour's first term. The credit boom has taken employment rates to historic highs, even if only 40 per cent of Britain's workforce are in tenured, full-time jobs. Crucially, for the regime's opinion-poll ratings, personal consumption has grown at an average 5.7 per cent between 1998 and 2003—albeit still based on soaring household debt, shored up by rising house prices.

For some observers, Britain has now entered a new 'post-decline' era of economic buoyancy, with growth rates higher and unemployment lower than the major Eurozone countries.⁶ On this view, globalization plus neo-liberal policies have turned the UK's traditional financial and commercial bias to advantage, making it the ideal offshore servicing platform for international capital; deindustrialization will bring the final quietus to stagnant manufacturing. But many of the underlying contours of British decline still persist. GDP growth since 1997 has largely been dependent on an expanding workforce, particularly in the low-skilled sector, and longer hours worked, rather than rising output per worker hour. Across the economy as a whole, productivity levels are still low by G7 standards. Investment has lagged, especially in ICT, where the paucity of funds has generally been attributed to poor skill levels and depressed R&D spending. Overall, the UK ratio of capital per hour worked ranks among the lowest in the EU.⁷ Meanwhile, the country's historic infrastructural backlog has not been solved by privatization. The railway network is plagued by breakdowns and fatalities, with the same recipes poised to

⁶ Andrew Gamble, 'Theories and Explanations of British Decline' in Richard English and Michael Kenny, eds, *Rethinking British Decline*, Basingstoke 2000. Such prognoses are not new. Around 1987, at the height of the Lawson boom, the pages of the financial press and even learned journals rhapsodized on the UK renaissance.

⁷ Stephen Nickell, 'The Assessment. The Economic Record of the Labour Government since 1997', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2002 (henceforward *oxrep*, 2002); Mary O'Mahoney, 'Productivity and Convergence in the EU', *National Institute Economic Review*, 180, April 2002.

yield equally dire results on the London Underground. The Blair–Brown shibboleth of 30-year contracts for ‘private finance initiatives’ to fund capital developments in transport, energy, hospitals and schools locks those services into huge repayments to corporations for decades ahead.

Gross transfers to the rich from the poor have continued under New Labour. Indirect taxes, though they have fallen slightly following the mass protests against fuel prices in 2000, are still higher than in Thatcher’s day. Brown’s tax credits for low-paid parents and pensioners—garnering much praise from left-liberal commentators for giving the poorest decile an extra £15 a week—have been offset by larger changes in underlying income distribution; according to one recent analysis, ‘the overall pattern of inequality is little changed, remaining at historically high levels’.⁸ The minimum wage, at £8,736 per year, is set below labour-market rates for most of the country; the Tories are pledged to retain it.⁹ Wage differentials and the gender pay gap have widened during Labour’s second term, and the UK Gini coefficient has continued on the upward trajectory it has followed since 1979.

Other social indicators are equally bleak. Literacy levels have now fallen below those of the United States—let alone the EU. Pupil–teacher ratios still lag substantially behind eurozone levels. Since 1997, teachers’ pay has slipped by 9 per cent (for men) and 11 per cent (for women) down their respective relative-pay ladders. New Labour’s response to the ensuing shortages has been the employment of still lower-paid, lower-skilled ‘classroom assistants’.¹⁰ Health spending, too, remains so far behind European levels that even if projected increases—currently under threat—go through, British expenditure, at 8.7 per cent of GDP, will still be well below the expected West European average of 10.7 per cent. Waiting times in Accident and Emergency departments are now longer than when New Labour came to power. The number of doctors per 1,000 of population is currently 1 in the UK, compared to 2.7 in the

⁸ Tom Clark et al, ‘Taxes and Transfers 1997–2001’, Oxfam, 2002, p. 198.

⁹ The minimum wage is set at £4.20 per hour (August 2003) and inapplicable to under-21s. Claims that over 1 million workers ‘have benefited’ from its introduction are overstated, rather, ‘would be in a position to benefit if they were able to take their employer to a tribunal’. See *National Minimum Wage: Report of the Low Pay Commission*, April 2003, pp. 14, 22–3.

¹⁰ *Statistics of Education: Class Sizes and Pupil Teacher Ratios*, Dept for Education and Skills, February 2003, pp. 12, 18. Literacy levels measured by percentage of the population on the bottom two, of five, gradations of reading and writing ability.

United States, 3 in France and 3.4 in Germany. New Labour's per capita recruitment targets for doctors and nurses, even if projected through to 2024, still fall below the average that the EU achieved in 1997. Blair's private-finance programme for selected foundation hospitals looks set to increase inequality—via marketization—within the overall dearth.¹¹

New Labour statecraft

More than its economic and social policies, it was New Labour's constitutional proposals that caused most excitement among its well-wishers before 1997. The hope was that the modest measures on offer might catalyse a dynamic which, reinforced by European integration, could challenge the fictions of Crown-in-Parliament—even, in wilder imaginations, the monarchy itself. Once again, the 'Blair Revolution' has delivered its promise: piecemeal reforms. Peripheral devolution—affecting some 13.5 per cent of the population—has been made fact. The Callaghan government had been toppled for renegeing on its promise of a regional assembly in Edinburgh. From John Smith's time, New Labour was pledged to be more canny. An element of proportional representation has allowed the Scottish Parliament, established in 1999, to represent a slightly wider span of opinion than permitted at Westminster, with a handful of Socialists and Greens. But its limited powers and the stranglehold of a Labour–Lib Dem pact keeps Holyrood a relay for English policies—one reason for a 2003 turnout of under 50 per cent, the lowest north of the border since 1852.¹² In Wales, where high unemployment levels add bitterness to complaints about the multi-million pound new Assembly building in Cardiff, turnout last year scraped 38 per cent to return a scant Labour majority. In Northern Ireland, Blair has worked assiduously for the success of the American-initiated peace process begun under Major; one genuine, if limited, achievement has been the reduction of sectarian killings there.¹³

¹¹ Julian Le Grand, 'The Labour Government and the National Health Service', *OXREP*, 2002, Audit Commission, *Acute Hospital Portfolio*, London 2001, p. 141. For a powerful critique of New Labour's PPP and PFI programmes for the NHS and beyond, see Colin Leys, *Market-Driven Politics*, London 2001, pp. 177–202; Alysson Pollock et al, 'Public Services and the Private Sector', Catalyst Working Paper, 2001.

¹² *Guardian*, 3 May 2003.

¹³ Though the most striking victory over sectarianism was achieved, according to one participant, on 15 February 2003, when tens of thousands from both communities marched shoulder to shoulder, while banners proclaimed 'ULSTER SAYS NO—to war'.

But partial democratization at the periphery has been accompanied by an unprecedented tightening of power at the centre—of far greater moment for the UK state as a whole. Thatcher may have stripped Establishment institutions of much of their charisma but she took care to leave them formally intact. For Blair too, *ancien régime* flummery and patronage—albeit reduced to pastiche—plus sovereign-parliament freedom from checks and balances, have proved the perfect shell for neoliberal statecraft.¹⁴ There was never any question of electing—or even appointing—a Constituent Assembly. The mooted referendum on proportional representation was kicked into the long grass, once the 1997 election results came in. The feudal upper chamber has been cynically recast as a well-upholstered arena for official appointees, head-hunted via an accountancy firm, Pricewaterhouse Coopers. Mass royalist spectacles have been avidly seized—or staged—as photo opportunities for the Prime Minister.

Meanwhile, the Blair government has institutionalized an authoritarian concentration of control within Downing Street itself quite new to the UK system. Thatcher's governments always included substantial, independent-minded figures—Gilmour, Carrington, Heseltine, Lawson, Howe—whose clashes with her punctuated the 1980s; Major's were notoriously fractious. Genuine Cabinet debate came to an abrupt end with New Labour. On the very morrow of the 1997 victory, Brown and Blair scornfully dismissed their top civil servant's suggestion that the Cabinet should at least be informed that interest rates would henceforth be set by the Bank of England. 'They'll agree', the Prime Minister is reported to have said.¹⁵ Blair has installed a private staff vastly bigger than Major's, not counting the seedy new-age entourage of the First Lady. The Hutton inquiry permitted a glimpse into this swarm of 'special advisers', pliant security heads and tabloid-trained factotums in Downing Street, bustling feverishly to do their leader's will in whatever murky operation is to hand.¹⁶ The moral atmosphere—reminiscent of

¹⁴ See Tom Nairn, *Pariah*, London 2002, *passim*.

¹⁵ Andrew Rawnsley, *Servants of the People*, p. 33. It was considered a novelty worthy of front-page reports and approving editorials when, in May 2003, after six years of New Labour government, the Cabinet was summoned for its first discussion on whether Britain should join the euro.

¹⁶ Reinforced in June 2001 by a contingent brought in from the late-Cold War British Embassy in Moscow, including David Manning—strongly backed by Michael Levy, Blair's fundraiser and special envoy to the Middle East—as *de facto* national security adviser and opposite number to Condoleezza Rice; Francis Richards at GCHQ; John Scarlett as head of the Joint Intelligence Committee.

Nixon's Oval Office—was exemplified in Blair's nervous-obsessive drive to force an unreliable underling out into the open, without exposing himself: 'TB said he didn't want to push the system too far'.¹⁷

Toughness issues

At the Home Office, Blunkett has surpassed his Draconian Tory predecessors in pandering to prejudice on criminal-justice and immigration issues, and shifting power from the judiciary to the executive on sentencing policy. The new Criminal Justice Bill will not only limit the right to trial by jury and remove the rule against double jeopardy, but increase obstacles to the admission of defence evidence, expand police powers to stop and search, and extend possibilities of detention without charge. In its Asylum and Immigration Acts of 1999 and 2002, New Labour has instituted cruelties—the voucher system; 'dispersal'; total employment ban—from which even Howard drew back.¹⁸ Blair's own thoughts on these 'touchstone issues', revealed in private memos leaked to *The Times* in July 2000, provide an insight into the ambition, vanity and hypertension of the 1980s lawyer behind the mask (described, even by his political uncle Roy Jenkins, as a second-rate mind). In these hand-written documents, the Prime Minister expounds on the need to combine:

'on your side' issues with toughness and standing up for Britain . . . We need a thoroughly worked out strategy to regain the initiative in this area . . . This should be done soon and I, personally, should be associated with it.

Asylum and crime. These may appear unlinked to patriotism but they are, partly because they are toughness issues; partly because they reach deep into British instincts

¹⁷ From the diary of Blair's Director of Communications, Alastair Campbell, as presented to the Inquiry. See www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk for a bulging cache of Downing Street documents discussing how best to present vague or unsubstantiated intelligence on Iraqi WMD as a case for war. The Hutton Report on the events that led to the death of the former UNSCOM inspector, David Kelly, who spoke too openly about Number Ten's manipulation of the '45-minutes' claim, is due to be published in January 2004.

¹⁸ For an excellent account see John Upton, 'Feasting on Power', *London Review of Books*, 10 July 2003. New Labour has also surpassed the Conservatives in its support for reactionary local Hindu and Muslim currents on education issues. The blend of multicultural piety and neo-imperial ruthlessness was memorably encapsulated by a Blair aide in December 1998: 'We were going to have real difficulties squeezing in enough bombing time before Ramadan'. Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, p. 31.

On crime, we need to highlight tough measures: compulsory tests for drugs before bail; the PIU report on confiscation of assets; the extra number of burglars jailed under 'three strikes and you're out'. On asylum, we need to be highlighting removals.¹⁹

Party of war

In its essentials, New Labour's diplomatic policy has been a continuation of the UK's standard post-Suez stance: no longer a power, Britain could still be an 'influence' on Washington, most effectively by brokering interests between Europe and the US. But the post-Cold War global context has added a new twist, a ratcheting up of American demands. Under New Labour, London has been pledged both to fight for neo-liberal deregulation throughout the EU and to keep Europe rallied behind the US, militarily and diplomatically, even with the Soviet threat gone. The organic links between domestic and foreign policy have been clear enough. If a globalized free market was—in the slack Las Vegas-speak of Third Way theorists—the only game in town, the US was its only marshal. City and multinational interests had every reason to support a superpower that carried a big stick, if it was used to reinforce the unfettered freedom of finance capital and the marketization of public assets around the globe.

Historically Labour's leaders, less burdened by ideals of nation and empire, have often proved more eagerly subservient to Washington than the Conservatives. Attlee, informed by his ambassador that the Americans would 'test the quality of the partnership by our attitude to the notion of a token ground force', had no hesitation in splitting his Cabinet and purloining NHS funds to rearm for Korea.²⁰ Eden, in contrast, defied the White House with Suez. Wilson applauded Vietnam (though he baulked at the token force) while Heath—alone of postwar prime ministers—never went to Washington and refused US demands for the use of British bases during the Yom Kippur War. Even Thatcher,

¹⁹ 'Touchstone Issues': memoranda from 'TB' of December 1999 and April 2000, *The Times*, 16 and 27 July 2000. The shallowness of the Blair persona was sharply exposed in the panic that erupted in July 2003 when, his key advisors—in this instance, Alastair Campbell, Sally Morgan and Jonathan Powell—having judged him capable of managing a business-promotion tour of the Far East on his own, the Prime Minister was stranded without his entourage as news of Kelly's death came through.

²⁰ Alex Danchev, *Oliver Franks, Founding Father*, Oxford 1993, p. 126.

Atlanticist to the hilt, expressed her anger over the invasion of Grenada. Major and Hurd were openly dubious about US policy in Yugoslavia in the mid-1990s; Paris was much closer to Washington than London was, at that point. Nonetheless, Blair's vow to Clinton—'Whither thou goest, I will go'—has given Labour's thralldom a new twist.

Under Clinton, national-security doctrine had already evolved towards 'the dramatic escalation of the use of military force to settle other countries' domestic conflicts', as a means to refashion the inherited international order.²¹ As Albright famously put it: 'What's the point of having the world's greatest military force if you don't use it?' Iraq—already effectively partitioned, sanctioned, subject to intimidatory USAF overflights—was the key Middle Eastern target. Clinton signed off on regime change in 1998, providing New Labour's first chance to prove its loyalty. Between the onset of Operation Desert Fox in December 1998 and the summer of 2000, USAF and RAF aircraft pounded Iraq with around 400 tons of ordnance, firing over 1,100 missiles in the first eight months alone. The UK, according to Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon, was responsible for around one fifth of these.²² The bombing of Iraq continued throughout the final act of the dismemberment of Yugoslavia.

Here New Labour once again proved more aggressive than its Conservative predecessor and displayed far greater disregard for international law. NATO's 78-day aerial bombardment of Yugoslavia was in clear breach of the doctrine of national sovereignty and coolly bypassed the UN Security Council. Blair now emerged as even more hawkish than the White House, pressing for ground troops as well as air attacks. Downing Street's top PR talents were dispatched to NATO HQ in Brussels, where Campbell and Hoon competed with Bernard Kouchner to elevate 'genocides' into 'holocausts'. Blair's particular advantage over other middle-ranking world leaders, his advisers believed, was his ability to reassure Americans about the nobility of their imperial mission. His speech to Chicago bankers on the occasion of NATO's fiftieth anniversary—justifying pre-emptive military strikes and long-term land occupations by US-led forces—assured his audience that, under this newly minted 'doctrine of the international community', such actions

²¹ 'Changing Our Ways: America's Role in the New World', Carnegie Foundation, 1992.

²² *Hansard*, 24 May 2000; *New York Times*, 13 August 1999; see also Tariq Ali, 'Throttling Iraq', NLR 5, September–October 2000.

could be guided by 'a more subtle blend of mutual self-interest and moral purpose'.²³

The transition from Clinton to Bush may have called for some psychological adjustments in Downing Street—where aides had been boasting in October 2000 that Gore's team was showing them how to win the next election—but it required no shift in diplomatic policy. London's strategic rationale was still that of influence with the White House. After September 11, Blair once again pulled out every rhetorical stop for the war on terror. Britain was America's closest aide-de-camp as Operation Enduring Freedom rolled across Afghanistan. By the spring of 2002, Brown had already set aside a war-chest of £3 billion to prepare a 40,000 strong British invasion force for the conquest of Iraq.

The confection of weapons intelligence had started even earlier, with the UK once again taking pole position in circulating WMD 'evidence', with ever-lower standards set. The faked faxes allegedly from Niger government officials detailing sales of yellowcake uranium to Iraq were, according to IAEA specialists, 'depressingly bad'.²⁴ In September 2002, launching his dossier 'Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction', Blair announced to the House of Commons: 'The WMD programme is up and running . . . [Saddam Hussein] has existing and active military plans for the use of chemical and biological weapons, which could be activated within 45 minutes'.²⁵ A second UK dossier, commended by Colin Powell to the UN in February 2003—'I would call my colleagues' attention to the fine paper that the United Kingdom distributed yesterday which describes in exquisite detail Iraqi deception activities'—famously included material downloaded from the web that recycled 12-year-old evidence, with no reference to dates.

Had the invasion of Iraq met with no stronger response than sullen passivity, Blair's trumped up *casus belli* and forged WMD dossiers would no doubt have been forgotten. As it is, from May 2003 onwards the tough local resistance to the occupation has begun to produce a reckoning in the UK, although typically displaced from political realities. Little stress has been put by the British media on the Blair government's

²³ 'Doctrine of the International Community', speech to the Economic Club, Chicago, 23 April 1999.

²⁴ Seymour Hersh, *Prospect*, June 2003.

²⁵ *Hansard*, 24 September 2002.

responsibility for the numberless Iraqis killed or injured during the heavy preliminary bombing and land invasion; or for those shot at road-blocks, on demonstrations, or in their homes; for the thousands of prisoners, held without trial, hooded and handcuffed Israeli-fashion; for the shops and houses bulldozed in reprisal, as in Jenin; for the inferno of social breakdown and destruction of material infrastructure that has accompanied the Anglo-American occupation. Instead, UK attention has centred almost entirely on the apparent suicide of a British toxic-weapons specialist from UNSCOM—thoroughly colonized, under Rolf Ekeus, by the CIA and MI6. The Hutton Inquiry, however revealing, has also served to keep thoughts focused on local backstabbing, so accounts can be settled without calling into question the continuing neo-imperialist occupation of Mesopotamia and the British role there. Such matters are for Washington to decide.

Disputes in Europe

Part of New Labour's initial appeal to liberal sentiment rested on its promise to 'take Britain into the heart of Europe', breaking with Tory xenophobia and chauvinism to pursue a more positive engagement with the Continent. This is the one element in its original set of promises that has been largely discarded. To the satisfaction of Murdoch and large sections of the City, the UK remains outside the Eurozone. No referendum on the single currency is in sight. Schengen rules do not apply. Brown has been leading a hard fight for free-market nostrums within the economic provisions of the draft European constitution; the UK's anti-federal demands are already inscribed in the decision-making process. The eastward sprawl of the EU, strongly backed by Washington; had always promised the fatal disablement of any unified assertion of European power. In dividing New Europe from Old over Iraq, the US has now cracked that project across the skull, with London's help. Under Blair and Brown's watch, Britain has quarrelled more bitterly with France and Germany than at any time since the Second World War.

But, as predicted in these pages, now that Iraq has for the moment been battened down, London is hastening to mend fences with Paris and Berlin, and they with the White House.¹⁶ Chirac and Schroeder lose no chance to proclaim how much their respective armed forces are contributing to NATO operations in the Balkans and Afghanistan. Blair has gone

¹⁶ See Tariq Ali, 'Recolonizing Iraq', NLR 21, May–June 2003, p. 17.

as far as he dare in support of a convincing European Defence Force. The heart flutter that saw him briefly hospitalized in October 2003 came immediately after Washington had banged the table over the necessity of NATO leadership for any such corps.

The Blair cult and its acolytes

The nature and extent of Thatcher's hegemony was hotly debated during the 1980s but it was always clear that a majority of the intelligentsia—writers, academics, artistic circles, TV programmers at Channel 4 and BBC2—were intransigently hostile to her government. Though it had powerful support from the Murdoch, Black and *Mail* media conglomerates, the Conservative regime was always opposed by the *Guardian*, *Observer* and *Mirror*, and had only qualified approval from the *Financial Times*. The *Independent* and *London Review of Books*, both launched in the 1980s, were antagonistic. Yet there was no automatic pole of political attraction for these liberal or mildly social-democratic layers.²⁷ 'Independence', even if it meant isolation, was a declaration of virtue.

Blair, in contrast, has enjoyed the backing of virtually the entire media lobby.²⁸ The blessings of the Murdoch empire—much courted by New Labour with TV-franchise promises—and of the financial press are logical enough. The *Economist* has explained with particular clarity why Blair is 'the best Conservative prime minister' they could wish for. The adulation he has received from former anti-Thatcherites—while implementing a domestic programme virtually identical to that which they abhorred under her regime, and an overseas one far bloodier—is a more arresting phenomenon. In a crowded market, critical front-page headlines will always sell more papers. But inside, a swathe of centre-left opinion makers have toiled to articulate a Blairite common sense over the last seven years—swinging, sometimes within the same column, from high-church pomposity to louche understanding, in their attempts to square the normal expectations of left-liberal conscience with a policy

²⁷ If anything, the majority were closest in outlook to the pro-Europe, anti-union SDP, which split from the right of Labour in the early 1980s and ended up in alliance with the Liberal Democrats.

²⁸ In the 2001 election this included the whole Murdoch stable: *The Times*, *Sun* and their Sunday editions; the *Economist* and *Financial Times* (which had switched, somewhat gingerly, as early as 1992); *Independent*, *Guardian*, *Express* and *Mirror*. The *Daily Mail* stayed silent. Only the *Telegraph* supported the Conservatives.

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agenda that systematically overrides them; in the process, saturating the political semiosphere with a fog of apologia.

No postwar prime minister has ever been hailed with the eulogies that greeted Blair after the May 1997 elections. His ‘principles and objectives, a mix of hard-headed idealism, deserve the trust the country has so massively placed in him’, Hugo Young told *Guardian* readers; Blair had ‘the most personal vision, pursued with the most single-minded courage, that any modern leader has shown’. Polly Toynbee in the *Independent* described a citizenry ‘bowled over’ by Blair’s speeches on tv: ‘men and women said they’d wept. They believe in his humility, his emotion, his radical passion.’ For Euan Ferguson in the *Observer*, Blair ‘had pulled off a stunning, apocalyptic victory’; he was ‘the only man with the courage, foresight and determination to bring an end to the most venal and mendacious government this century . . . No cynical opportunist he, no lover of soundbites for their own sake. New Britain? Fairness not favours? These are Blair’s own words, his own beliefs.’²⁹

The Blair cult, replete with talk about ‘grown-up politics’ and ‘Britain being comfortable with itself’, has been a novel departure for London’s liberal intelligentsia, which traditionally prided itself on a certain dryness and distance of tone. From the outset worries about corruption, for which Major’s ministers had been pilloried, were waved aside. Disquiet when Formula One motor racing was exempted from a tobacco-advertising ban—following a £1 million donation to New Labour from the sport’s chairman, Bernie Ecclestone, over which both Brown and Blair lied to the press—was assuaged the instant Blair declared on tv that he was a ‘pretty straight sort of guy’. Peter Mandelson’s six-figure loan from the offshore account of the man about to be appointed Paymaster General evinced from Hugo Young the comment: ‘If moral perfection is the standard, soon there will be no leaders left’. Francis Wheen found it ‘difficult to see what uniquely vile offence Mandelson committed’ in intervening at the Home Office to speed a British passport for Srihand Hinduja—on the run from criminal corruption charges over the Bofors arms deal in India, but nevertheless donor of £3 million to the Millennium Dome’s Faith Zone. Polly Toynbee was driven to demand ‘Who lives without often economizing with the truth?’ as Cherie Blair

²⁹ Young, *Guardian*, 2 May 1997; Toynbee, *Independent*, 3 May 1997; Ferguson, *Observer*, 4 May 1997. The *FT* confined itself to an editorial purr over the rise of uk gilts and equities with the election results.

overrode ministerial regulations on investment, used Downing Street notepaper to secure a property deal and put pressure on the Home Office over the deportation of her personal style-guru's lover.³⁰

Spellbound

The fervour of the Blair cult intensified with the drumbeat of war. In Kosovo, 'It was a British Christian whom Albanian Muslims thanked for their salvation', Andrew Rawnsley sermonized for the *Observer*. While in Afghanistan: 'The last few weeks have been an opportunity to display many of his best qualities as a man and leader. There's little question that he has risen to the challenge quite magnificently'. The *Economist* concurred: 'He is grave, not grandiloquent. He is often sincerely moved. This emotional fluency is a wonderful gift in politics, especially at times of war'.³¹ 'Blair's undeviating allegiance to Washington is justified', wrote Young, as cluster bombs and daisy-cutters rained down on Afghan villages. For David Marquand, his conduct was 'impeccable', showing that 'a British prime minister with the right mixture of courage, grace and forensic skill could play a significant, outward-looking internationalist geopolitical role'. Neither the extension of American military bases across Central Asia nor the blithe disregard of the UN raised a scruple in this instance. In joining the assault on Kabul, the *Guardian* assured its readers, Blair 'did something big and right'.³²

It was only with the approach of a full-scale Anglo-American invasion of Iraq that Blair's liberal following began to baulk. Many rediscovered their admiration for the sanctions-and-bombing regime of Operation Desert Fox as the countdown to war began, and peace demonstrations filled the streets of Europe and the US. Nevertheless—even as she lamented his alliance with the unsuitable Bush—Toynbee in the *Guardian* could declare Blair's presentation of the confiscated dossier on WMD to the House of Commons, in September 2002, 'a bravura performance, spellbinding in its quiet solemnity, reasoning the arguments one by one'. In general, the more unconvinced liberal commentators pronounced themselves

³⁰ Respectively: *On the Record*, BBC 1, 16 November 1997; *Guardian*, 29 December 1998; *Guardian*, 30 and 31 January 2001.

³¹ Rawnsley, *Servants of the People*, p. 291; Rawnsley, *Observer*, 7 October 2001; *Economist*, 20 September 2001.

³² Marquand, 'The Liberal Nation', *Prospect*, March 2002. *Guardian*, 30 October 2001; the *Daily Telegraph* hailed 'Blair's finest hour'.

by Blair's case, the more adulatory they became. 'An impassioned and impressive speech which may give future generations an inkling of how, when so many of his own party opposed his policy, Tony Blair nevertheless managed to retain their respect and support', was the *Guardian's* editorial opinion on 19 March 2003; adding, on 14 April, 'In ways that Bush never could, he provided a high-minded tone to the drive to war'.

Critics of his Iraq policy in the *London Review of Books* could still find Blair 'the most successful politician of his generation', 'unusually and sincerely devoted to international law', 'the democratic statesman par excellence', endowed with a 'very attractive' bonhomie, who had done 'the right thing' in Yugoslavia, and showed 'real passion' on Iraq, 'performing well' in a 'plausible', even if—in the final resort—wrong-headed cause: '*au fond* a good thing'.³³ Even the *Independent*, by far the most critical of the broadsheets on Iraq, swung round on the eve of invasion: 'Blair has shown himself in the past few days to be at once the most formidable politician in the country and the right national leader for these deeply uncertain times'. On his death-bed, Hugo Young, after bitterly reproaching the leader he loved for a mistake in Iraq—it was 'time for him to make way for Brown'—still saw the sub-contractor of Basra swathed in mists of greatness:

Tony Blair had such potential. He was a strong leader, a visionary in his way, a figure surpassing all around him. His rhetorical power was unsurpassed, as was the readiness of people to listen to him. He had their trust. He brought credibility back to the political art.³⁴

Prospects

Blair faces more than one *mauvais quart d'heure* at present, but it would take an extreme miscalculation on his part—or more serious health problems—for him not to survive them. Though the Prime Minister's supervision of the decisions that led to Kelly's death is perfectly clear, he

³³ Respectively, Conor Gearty, 'Blair's Folly', 20 February 2003; Ross McKibbin, 'Why Did He Risk It?', 3 April 2003; John Lanchester, 'Unbelievable Blair', 10 July 2003. For a tougher approach see 'Short Cuts' by the paper's consulting editor, John Sturrock: 19 June 2003.

³⁴ *Guardian*, 16 September 2003. A striking exception to all the above was Andreas Whittam Smith in the *Independent*: 'Iraq is Tony Blair's war. He should now do the honourable thing and resign': 29 September 2003.

was carefully shielded from cross-examination at the Hutton Inquiry by the presiding magistrate—whom he had himself selected. The Hutton Report, due in January 2004, is unlikely to do Blair any terminal damage, though it may prove an enjoyable moment for Brown's camp. The British judiciary are not known for rocking the political boat. Nor, in all probability, is Blair seriously at risk from discontent among Labour MPs over the government's latest obeisance to the market, the introduction of differential fees for university education. A party incapable of halting its leader's plunge to war would be quixotic to dismiss him for making one campus costlier than another. After swallowing so many larger toads, why should the backbenches gag at this one? In any case, Blair's eventual departure need not spell the end of New Labour. Brown, his obvious successor, is in some ways more deeply educated in the American ideology than Blair and more avowedly Atlanticist. If his hands are less steeped in blood it is only because they have been so busy at the till. A further lease of power under his redecoration is eminently possible. Responsibility for excesses at home and abroad can be conveniently swept away by a pseudo regime change.

In uniting around Howard, the Conservatives have regained some of the animal spirits necessary for a political party to operate, but they start from an abysmally low electoral base. In addition, they face a tough struggle against increasingly unequal electoral representation. The population drain from Scotland and the North into southern England, and the suburbanization of the countryside, have swollen the number of voters in safe Conservative seats; at the same time, deindustrialization has emptied the old Labour regions. Had they won the same share of the vote as Labour in 2001, the distribution of the Conservative electorate would nevertheless have left them with 140 seats fewer under the first-past-the-post system. To gain an overall majority (of one) in Parliament, the Tories would have to be 11.5 per cent ahead in votes, whereas Labour could be 3.7 behind in votes and still retain control of the House of Commons. Boundary changes are due, but will continue to lag some years behind the demographic tide.³⁵ The cards are still stacked massively against any quick Tory comeback.

³⁵ Butler and Kavanagh, *British General Election 2001*, p. 332. The Conservatives also face a political identity problem. The suggestion floated before Howard's assumption of the leadership, that Clarke might lead a group of pro-Europe, anti-Iraq War Conservative MPs into the Liberal Democrats, would have created a formation clearly to the left of New Labour, though still within the ambit of neoliberal politics.

North Atlantic comparisons

How, then, should New Labour be seen in comparative perspective? It is obvious enough that neo-labourism is a variant of neoliberalism. But the neoliberal revolution has taken two different political routes over the last twenty years. The high road pursued by the pioneers involved all-out class warfare against organized labour, exemplified (in chronological order) by Pinochet, Thatcher and Reagan. In the USSR and Eastern Europe, the collapse of communism allowed a local version of this route, in which social demoralization was such that there was little resistance to crush. By contrast, the low road, taken by perhaps the majority of capitalist democracies, was to institute marketization almost by stealth, keeping clashes with labour as limited, sectoral and de-ideologized as possible, but slowly consolidating a mass social layer with a vocal interest in extending the rights of private property and reducing social protection mechanisms. This has been the route adopted in most of Western Europe, in the larger countries of Latin America—Argentina under Menem and Brazil under Cardoso—and in India, first under Congress and now the BJP.

Over time, combinations of the two have also emerged. France offers an illustration: Juppé attempting the high road in the mid-1990s and being defeated by stiff popular resistance; Jospin taking the low road, with an inconspicuous but steadily advancing programme of privatization; Raffarin then discovering that there now existed a larger social base that would support pension and other changes, against trade-union opposition. Sequences of this kind, increasingly common, indicate a general transformation of the political landscape since the end of the Cold War. Over the last decade, long-standing overlaps between the policies of conservative and liberal, or Christian Democrat and Social Democrat parties—always compatible with quite sharp ideological and political distinctions between them—have tended to fuse into a qualitatively more homogeneous programme. Traditional contrasts have counted for less and less, and conjunctural opportunities—or constraints—weighed more in determining which of the pair could carry the standard of neoliberalism further.

It is still the case, of course, that the two broad fronts maintain differentiated cultural palettes, designed to appeal to distinctive core constituencies as well as attracting unaffiliated layers. The balance of forces

between them will typically be determined by the point that the society in question has reached along the neoliberal spectrum. Viewed in this light, New Labour in Britain occupies a peculiar position that explains much of its success. Across Northern Europe—Scandinavia, Germany, Austria, the Low Countries—trade-union movements have not been defeated in head-on confrontations, and survive as major institutions, if increasingly passive ones. In part as a result, much of the welfare-state provision developed in these countries in the postwar decades has yet to be seriously dismantled. Neither Social Democratic parties nor their Christian Democratic or liberal rivals have been able to do more than trim around the edges, although the direction of change is unmistakeable. Here the Dutch have made more headway along the low road than any of their neighbours.

Germany—where the SPD is spearheading a determined attack on the country's traditional social protections of the labour market and retirement—suggests the region may be entering a new stage. But although employers have welcomed Schroeder's Agenda 2010—and his warmer relations with labour leaders may give him a short-term advantage in pushing changes through—capital has no particular preference for Social Democratic parties, either in Germany or throughout Northwest Europe. Their trade-union bases remain distinctly less reassuring than their parliamentary leaderships. Nor, despite the best intentions of their elites, have these parties been transformed ideologically into explicitly pro-capitalist formations, along Anglo-Saxon lines. They cannot yet offer themselves as the most reliable instruments for neoliberal progress. Centre Right alternatives, of which the current Danish regime is the most effective example, often remain a better option. In Germany itself, Christian Democracy—bilked of victory in 2002—has the whip hand in the opinion polls.

In the United States, an opposite situation prevails. There organized labour is so weak, the black and other movements of the oppressed so co-opted or destroyed, the poor so defenceless, that the ideological terrain—shared by both Democrats and Republicans—is well to the right of the scene in Europe. By international standards, the Clinton Administration did sterling service in advancing the neoliberal cause, with an attack on welfare and deregulation of financial markets that Old World governments of the right could only envy, not to mention breakthrough innovations in neo-imperial policing abroad. But in domestic

terms, Clinton simply cleared the road to Bush's 'compassionate conservatism'. Once the Democratic Party and organized labour had been still further purged of New Deal residues, there was no reason for us capital to content itself with Third Ways. The result is a Republican Administration committed to a programme for the corporations and the rich unseen since the days of McKinley.

The British synthesis

Britain, on the other hand, had possessed a strong, if defensive trade-union movement with a relatively cohesive working-class culture. In breaking its resistance to the cutting edge of neoliberalism in the North Atlantic zone, Thatcher made possible cuts in social spending, and transformations of labour and financial markets, without parallel in Europe. But her increasing hostility to the EU, the deepening divisions within Tory ranks under her successor, and evidence of electoral restlessness after nearly two decades of the same regime, gradually diminished the attractions of Conservative rule for the City and British multinational capital at large.

In these conditions, once Blair had completed the institutional transformation of the party begun by Kinnock—subordinating both constituencies and trade unions to the leadership—and turned it around ideologically, New Labour could become a superior option. It could credibly guarantee fresh momentum, uncompromised by the scandals of Major's time, to press ahead with the programme of deregulation and privatization—above all in health, where booming US profits show what fortunes can be reaped;³⁶ but also in university education. At the same time, it could sell all this to its working-class voters, and the popular electorate at large, as a more socially inclusive and concerned system of rule, mitigating the harshness of Thatcherism. Unlike the Conservatives, New Labour also promised the domestication, not just the repression, of a trade-union movement that in numerical terms was still relatively large. It was because Blair had secured the politico-institutional foundation for this formula that he could forge a deal with Murdoch before his election and New Labour seal a pact with big business that has lasted ever since. A precondition of its dominance has been the ground-breaking work of Thatcherism, which has also given

³⁶ See Robert Brenner, 'New Boom or New Bubble?', p. 74 below

it—when required—a convenient foil to keep its voters and members in line. This has been reinforced by the damage the Thatcherite pioneers wreaked on the Conservative Party itself.

Structurally, it is this mid-way location between the American and North European patterns that has produced the characteristically hybrid culture of Blairism. Macroscopically, the OECD countries do not seem to be moving towards a political re-synchronization of the sort that characterized the 1980s and 90s.³⁷ The war on terror carries little conviction for the masses outside the United States. There seems small chance that the current range of variegated and competing ideologies in the Atlantic zone will suddenly align themselves either behind a neo-conservative model or in a reversion to the Centre Left. Could New Labour, however—especially if handed one ghoulish extension of office after another—point the way to a third possibility: a new hegemonic formula that would be a symbiosis of the two?

In December 2002 Rowan Williams, Blair's new Archbishop of Canterbury, laid out a highly political agenda. Unstoppable processes of globalization had installed a new, essentially consumerist political model: the market state, as described by Philip Bobbitt in his *Shield of Achilles*.³⁸ 'The government is now asking to be judged on its delivery of purchasing power and maximal choice', the Archbishop explained. But if the market state is here to stay, what of its legitimacy? What happens to the things that really matter, 'to social awareness, cumulative experience, growth and learning, in a marketized society'? The UK fuel protests of 2000 were evoked as a warning: work, relationships, schools, family, public life 'can do little' within the context of a rootless social environment. Williams concluded: 'Without the perspective of religion, our whole politics is likely to be in deep trouble'.

Here the neoliberal agenda is reiterated in a soft and caring voice: troubled for our future, for our environment, for our long-term incarcerated; sensitive to the cruelties of social deprivation, to the need for a 'shared world of values'; gay-loving (up to a point); beseeching us to speak to God as we wend our way through the market. Williams also called for the active involvement of organized religion in state-sponsored education

³⁷ See the editorial, 'Testing Formula Two', NLR 8, March–April 2001.

³⁸ For an account of the book see Gopal Balakrishnan, 'Algorithms of War', NLR 23, September–October 2003.

and social services. Reprinting the piece, in tandem with an interview with Blair on the marketization of the public sector ('twin texts for modern times'), the *Guardian* editorialized: 'Read the interview. Read the lecture. Each . . . is a powerful witness. We should be impressed that we have a premier and a prelate in touch with the real world in which we all must live.'³⁹

The real world that the synthesis of neo-labourism must negotiate includes, of course, the Anglo-American occupation of Iraq. Blair's solidarity with Bush still occasions surprise among his admirers, yet it follows logically from the New Labour formula. It was, after all, the Centre Left in the late 1990s that first forged what could properly be called neoliberal militarism, famously breaking with every previous diplomatic convention to establish the West's right to attack whatever country offended it, on humanitarian grounds of its own choosing—a frontal challenge to the basic precepts of the postwar order never attempted by Reagan or Bush Senior.

Today's Republican Administration has widened the pretexts for pre-emptive aggression, and wrapped them post 9.11 within a much more belligerent nationalism. But current US policy in the Middle East, with its talk of spreading democratization and women's rights, smells just as much of the Third Way as of the Project for the New American Century. The Bush and Blair regimes are by no means identical. But their alliance is natural—not just because of London's traditions of external fealty to Washington, but because of the internal positions of each within the neoliberal spectrum today. For the same reason, New Labour can never really cold-shoulder the EU as its predecessors did. Its intermediate location between American and European patterns ensures, in a rather

³⁹ Rowan Williams, Dimbleby Lecture 2002 and *Guardian*, 20 December 2002. Bobbitt responded in a letter to the *Guardian* the next day:

If only the great papers in my country had editorials of half such depth and clarity. At a time when the media enjoy greater influence and thus must bear greater responsibilities, it is really heartening to read such an essay. I am glad you are proud of your prime minister and see clearly precisely what struggle he is fighting—largely a struggle for intellectual and moral understanding. I am glad you are proud of your new archbishop and that you dismiss the caricature by which he is sometimes portrayed. At a time of deep confusion and enormous temptation to pander or dismiss, you are trying to see things as they are and describe them unflinchingly. I fear this will not make you very popular, at least in the short run (say, a quarter of a century). Some of your readers will feel betrayed. But you will also have your fans, including, Philip Bobbitt.

different sense from Blair's fond notion, that it will continue to be a 'bridge' between them:

Upshot

What political conclusions follow from this scene? A large section of left opinion in Britain, if now repudiating Blair, still clings to the idea that, whatever its record, New Labour remains a lesser evil which must, in the last resort, be defended at the polls. There are two standard arguments for doing so, each with its own constituency. In intellectual circles—where residual infatuation with Blair has persisted, much as it did with Kennedy in the us, long after the mask of the hero had slipped—a cultural identification is at work. There is a sense that somehow, despite the evidence, New Labour represents a better, more liberal vision of England than that of the New Conservatism. 'Think of all the ways in which the Tories made Britain seem mean-spirited, aggressively materialistic, philistine, corrupt and xenophobic', a contributor to the LRB exhorted its readers.⁴⁰ 'Seem' is the key term. Under New Labour, single-parent benefits can be cut, school buildings sold to private companies, cabinet seats handed out in exchange for home loans, millions taken for passports or advertising franchises, asylum seekers locked in country-of-origin detention camps—but, to this sensibility, it all feels much better. Any remaining doubts can be suppressed by invoking the ghost of Thatcher.

The alternative defence appeals to class rather than culture and is more popular with Labour and trade-union activists. Here the belief is that the soul of True Labour lies slumbering deep within New Labour's brittle carapace. The lived reality of Blair's policies is pushing public-sector workers and others at the sharp edge of the neoliberal assault to rediscover their class interests and move to more militant positions. Grass-roots pressure will force trade-union leaders to stand up to the government, demanding more labour-friendly policies, or that workers' needs be listened to, at least. The left should not abandon the party that trade-unionists still claim. Activists should stick with New Labour and offer criticism from within, while putting their shoulders to the electoral wheel.

But the New Labour party machine was definitively insulated against the left by Kinnock, two decades ago. Its democratic capture is unimaginable

⁴⁰ Lanchester, 'Unbelievable Blair'.

today. Furthermore, there is scant evidence of a new radical trade unionism on the march in Britain. Although labour markets are tight, days lost in industrial action remain at record lows. After twenty years of neoliberalism, the British working class itself has been transformed—above all, through the deindustrialization of its heartlands. Its capacities for collective action have visibly waned. Disciplined stands against New Labour have been increasingly minoritarian and defensive; if hard-fought, as with the firemen. Other sectors have become more atomized, financialized—as home owners and future pensioners—and relatively better off. Their potential for concerted social action has yet to be revealed.

With very few exceptions—Bob Crow, the railway workers' leader, is one—union bosses have rallied to Downing Street's side every time it mattered.⁴¹ The Transport and General Workers played a crucial role in disarming the potent but short-lived fuel protests of 2000—the closest thing there has been to a mass domestic movement against New Labour; though those involved overlapped to a large extent with the embittered ranks of the Countryside Alliance, which unites a service-starved rural populace with devotees of fox-hunting. For their part, the Fire Brigades Union called off a strongly supported strike in order to free up the troops standing in as black-legs, so they could be despatched for the conquest of Iraq. At the Labour Party Conference in September 2003, the bosses of the four big trade unions—Simpson (Amicus), Woodley (T&G), Prentis (Unison) and Curran (GMB)—instead of mobilizing their members for an electoral college to send Blair packing for his warmongering role, banded together to keep Iraq off the agenda. As for constituency delegates, the Prime Minister's address received a three-minute standing ovation from them. The shrinking party membership continues its rightward march. According to opinion polls taken before the invasion, two-thirds of Labour Party constituency chairs supported the war on Iraq—well above the level of national backing for it.

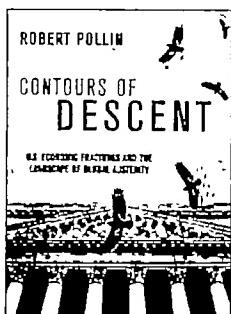
There is no reason for any greater sentimentality towards Labourism than Blair himself has shown. The *Economist's* judgement that he is the best right-wing prime minister Britain could have is perfectly accurate. For the left, the logic should be clear: any other would be preferable. It is

⁴¹ In other instances, fine speeches—by Bill Hayes of the Communication Workers Union, for example—failed to mobilize a divided workforce against privatization of the Post Office.

an anachronism to think that the performance of rival parties competing within the field of neoliberal politics can be distinguished, once in office, by their ideological pedigrees or electoral bases. The policies they adopt correspond to the balance of forces within that society—typically, the legacy of antecedent regimes—and of the world outside it. Just as Clinton was far to the right domestically of Nixon, so Blair has been of Heath; let alone Eden or Macmillan. Today, the UK's main opposition parties, Liberal Democrats and Conservatives, are attacking the government from the left on student fees and pensions, attracting the disapproval of the financial press.

Judged against its immediate predecessors, an objective audit can only conclude that New Labour has scattered a few crumbs to the poor, while otherwise consolidating and extending Thatcher's programme; externally, it has a far more bloodstained record. The civilians killed in Blair's successive aggressions abroad—Iraq, Yugoslavia, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Iraq—outnumber Thatcher's tally by tens of thousands. Such domestic pittances as the regime has distributed count for little beside the destruction of international legality and loss of foreign lives that has been the hallmark of this regime. Like any government, Britain's can only be judged on its record and on a rational assessment of its future trajectory. The sooner New Labour exits the better.

NEW FROM VERSO



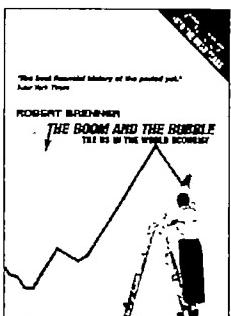
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FREDRIC JAMESON

THE POLITICS OF UTOPIA

UTOPIA WOULD SEEM to offer the spectacle of one of those rare phenomena whose concept is indistinguishable from its reality, whose ontology coincides with its representation. Does this peculiar entity still have a social function? If it no longer does so, then perhaps the explanation lies in that extraordinary historical dissociation into two distinct worlds which characterizes globalization today. In one of these worlds, the disintegration of the social is so absolute—misery, poverty, unemployment, starvation, squalor, violence and death—that the intricately elaborated social schemes of utopian thinkers become as frivolous as they are irrelevant. In the other, unparalleled wealth, computerized production, scientific and medical discoveries unimaginable a century ago as well as an endless variety of commercial and cultural pleasures, seem to have rendered utopian fantasy and speculation as boring and antiquated as pre-technological narratives of space flight.

The term alone survives this wholesale obsolescence, as a symbolic token over which essentially political struggles still help us to differentiate left and right. Thus ‘utopian’ has come to be a code word on the left for socialism or communism; while on the right it has become synonymous with ‘totalitarianism’ or, in effect, with Stalinism. The two uses do seem somehow to overlap, and imply that a politics which wishes to change the system radically will be designated as utopian—with the right-wing undertone that the system (now grasped as the free market) is part of human nature; that any attempt to change it will be accompanied by violence; and that efforts to maintain the changes (against human nature) will require dictatorship. So two practical-political issues are at play here: a left critique of social-democratic reformism, within the system; and on the other hand a free-market fundamentalism. But why not simply discuss those issues directly and openly, without recourse to this, seemingly

literary, third issue of utopia? Indeed, one could turn the question around and say that we are perfectly free to discuss utopia as a historical and textual or generic issue, but not to complicate it with politics. (In any case, has the word not always been used by some of the most eminent political figures on all sides as an insulting slur on their enemies?)

Yet the waning of the utopian idea is a fundamental historical and political symptom, which deserves diagnosis in its own right—if not some new and more effective therapy. For one thing, that weakening of the sense of history and of the imagination of historical difference which characterizes postmodernity is, paradoxically, intertwined with the loss of that place beyond all history (or after its end) which we call utopia. For another, it is difficult enough to imagine any radical political programme today without the conception of systemic otherness, of an alternate society, which only the idea of utopia seems to keep alive, however feebly. This clearly does not mean that, even if we succeed in reviving utopia itself, the outlines of a new and effective practical politics for the era of globalization will at once become visible; but only that we will never come to one without it.

Banishing evil

Let us begin again, then, with the textual utopias themselves. Here we encounter two alternate possibilities of analysis, which can be designated respectively as the causal and the institutional, or perhaps even the diachronic and the synchronic. The first of these has to do with the utopian world as such; or better and more precisely, with the way in which this or that ‘root of all evil’ has been eliminated from that world. In Thomas More, for example, what every reader famously takes away—as from Plato, too—is the abolition of private property. This allegedly makes both More and Plato precursors of communism. But a closer look, and an inquiry into the theory of human nature that underpins both these assaults on the institution of private property, discloses a rather different position: that the root of all evil is to be found in gold or money, and that it is greed (as a psychological evil) which needs to be somehow repressed by properly utopian laws and arrangements in order to arrive at some better and more humane form of life. The question of hierarchy and egalitarianism is, on this interpretation, primed in More by the more fundamental question of money. This kind of utopianism has had a long and illustrious descendency, to Proudhon and Henry

George and on down to Major Douglas and the famous stamp-script dear to Ezra Pound; but such names already suggest that it may not be altogether correct to read the denunciation of money as the direct ancestor of communism.

More was concerned to eliminate individual property relations; Marx's critique of property was designed to eliminate the legal and individual possession of the collective means of production; and the elimination of that kind of private property was meant to lead to a situation in which classes as such disappeared, and not merely social hierarchies and individual injustices. I would want to go further than this and assert that what is crucial in Marx is that his perspective does not include a concept of human nature; it is not essentialist or psychological; it does not posit fundamental drives, passions or sins like acquisitiveness, the lust for power, greed or pride. Marx's is a structural diagnosis, and is perfectly consistent with contemporary existential, constructivist or anti-foundationalist and postmodern convictions which rule out presuppositions as to some pre-existing human nature or essence. If there have been not just one human nature but a whole series of them, this is because so-called human nature is historical: every society constructs its own. And, to paraphrase Brecht, since human nature is historical rather than natural, produced by human beings rather than innately inscribed in the genes or DNA, it follows that human beings can change it; that it is not a doom or destiny but rather the result of human praxis.

Marx's anti-humanism, then (to use another term for this position), or his structuralism, or even his constructivism, spells a great advance over More. But once we grasp utopianism in this way, we see that there are a variety of different ways to reinvent utopia—at least in this first sense of the elimination of this or that 'root of all evil', taken now as a structural rather than a psychological matter. These various possibilities can also be measured in practical-political ways. For example, if I ask myself what would today be the most radical demand to make on our own system—that demand which could not be fulfilled or satisfied without transforming the system beyond recognition, and which would at once usher in a society structurally distinct from this one in every conceivable way, from the psychological to the sociological, from the cultural to the political—it would be the demand for full employment, universal full employment around the globe. As the economic apologists for the system today have tirelessly instructed us, capitalism cannot flourish

under full employment; it requires a reserve army of the unemployed in order to function and to avoid inflation. That first monkey-wrench of full employment would then be compounded by the universality of the requirement, inasmuch as capitalism also requires a frontier, and perpetual expansion, in order to sustain its inner dynamic. But at this point the utopianism of the demand becomes circular, for it is also clear, not only that the establishment of full employment would transform the system, but also that the system would have to be already transformed, in advance, in order for full employment to be established. I would not call this a vicious circle, exactly; but it certainly reveals the space of the utopian leap, the gap between our empirical present and the utopian arrangements of this imaginary future.

Yet such a future, imaginary or not, also returns upon our present to play a diagnostic and a critical-substantive role. To foreground full employment in this way, as the fundamental utopian requirement, allows us, indeed, to return to concrete circumstances and situations, to read their dark spots and pathological dimensions as so many symptoms and effects of this particular root of all evil identified as unemployment. Crime, war, degraded mass culture, drugs, violence, boredom, the lust for power, the lust for distraction, the lust for nirvana, sexism, racism—all can be diagnosed as so many results of a society unable to accommodate the productiveness of all its citizens. At this point, then, utopian circularity becomes both a political vision and programme, and a critical and diagnostic instrument.

I have developed this suggestion—which is, to be sure, already present in More,¹ and in which I also believe; although we have yet to decide what the term ‘belief’ might mean when we are talking about utopias—in order to distinguish it from that second and rather different conception of utopia to which I now turn; returning in the process (as one apparently always must) to Thomas More. Suppose it were said that what is

¹ It should be noted that in More, Christianity and the monastic tradition inflect the concept of work towards duty rather than, as here, towards activity and productivity. In *Utopia*, indeed, the overt Epicureanism of the humanist text ('all our actions, and even the very virtues exercised in them, look at last to pleasure as their end and happiness') seems to spring more from aversion to Christian asceticism (which More however *also* practised) than from any very positive pleasure-loving source. See Thomas More, *Complete Works*, New Haven 1965, volume iv, p. 167.

truly utopian about More's text has nothing to do with his thoughts about money and human nature, but everything to do with his account of utopian arrangements and daily life: how the thing works politically—the division of the island into fifty-four cities, the organization into groups of thirty households each, the syphegants, the phylarchs, the senate, the transibors, the elected prince, the functioning of the households (and their dining arrangements), marriage, slaves, farming duties, laws and the like. If this is our focus and our interest, then I believe we must first and foremost observe that it involves an utter transformation of the previous perspective on utopia. I venture to suggest that our attention in the first or 'root of all evil' version of utopia was an essentially existential one: we as individuals entertain a relationship with money and greed, with property, and we are thereby led to wonder what life would be like without these things. This perspective is, I think, retained even in my own example: for we are most of us employed, but familiar with the fear of unemployment and the lack of income, and not unacquainted with the psychic misery involved in chronic unemployment, the demoralization, the morbid effects of boredom, the waste of vital energies and the absence of productivity—even if we tend to grasp these things in bourgeois and introspective ways.

Anonymous bliss

But when we turn to the utopian political schemes and arrangements I have mentioned, the perspective is utterly anonymous. The citizens of utopia are grasped as a statistical population; there are no individuals any longer, let alone any existential 'lived experience'. If More tells us that the utopians are 'easy-going, good-tempered, ingenious, and leisure-loving', or that, following Aristotle, 'they cling above all to mental pleasures, which they value as the first and foremost of all pleasures', this simply enhances the statistical impression rather than individualizing it.² The whole description is cast in the mode of a kind of anthropological otherness, which never tempts us for one minute to try to imagine ourselves in their place, to project the utopian individual with concrete existential density, even though we already know the details of his or her daily life (nowadays the notion of the everyday having more or less superseded that of private life). It may be objected that when we get to utopias of the type of William Morris (*News from Nowhere*) this depersonalization will

² More, *Complete Works*, vol. iv, pp. 179, 175.

no longer obtain; but perhaps his formulaic characters are, as Victorians, merely a little closer to us in time.³ Still, it is an important objection, since I want to argue that this effect of anonymity and of depersonalization is a very fundamental part of what utopia is and how it functions. The boredom or dryness that has been attributed to the utopian text, beginning with More, is thus not a literary drawback nor a serious objection, but a very central strength of the utopian process in general. It reinforces what is sometimes called today democratization or egalitarianism, but that I prefer to call plebeianization: our desubjectification in the utopian political process, the loss of psychic privileges and spiritual private property, the reduction of all of us to that psychic gap or lack in which we all as subjects consist, but that we all expend a good deal of energy on trying to conceal from ourselves.

Let's now return to the distinction I have been making between the two utopian perspectives, that of the root of all evil and that of the political and social arrangements. We should probably see each of them in two distinct ways: as wish-fulfilment and as construction. Both of these approaches clearly involve pleasure: almost by definition the wish-fulfilment has something to do with pleasure, even though it may involve a long detour and a multiple mediation through substitutes. Thus Ernst Bloch taught us long ago that advertising for patent medicines drew on the stubborn core of a longing for eternal life and the body transfigured. Such wishes are even more obvious when we come to the various utopias where old peasant dreams of a land of plenty, of roasted chickens flying into the mouth, as well as more learned fantasies about paradise and the earthly garden, linger close to the surface.

But the pleasures of construction may not be so evident: you have to think of them in terms of the garage workshop, of the home-mechanics erector sets, of Lego, of bricolating and cobbling together things of all kinds. To which we must also add the special pleasures of miniaturization: replicating the great things in handicraft dimensions that you can put together by yourself and test, as with home chemical sets, or change and rebuild in a never-ending variation fed by new ideas and information. Model railroads of the mind, these utopian constructions convey

³ I suspect, however, that depersonalization in such modern utopias is secured by mortality and the meaningless biological succession of the generations in a society which no longer knows either the meaning of History or the metaphysics of religion.

the spirit of non-alienated labour and of production far better than any concepts of *écriture* or *Spiel*.

Genres of political will

Yet each of these perspectives—construction fully as much as wish-fulfilment—knows constraints. Wishes cannot always be successfully fantasized: such is the operation of the constraints of narrative as well as of the Real. Constructions cannot always be built: such are the constraints of raw materials and the historical situation, which stand as the statics and dynamics, the elementary laws of gravity and locomotion, of the building of imaginary collectives. And some of these structural constraints can be identified by way of a comparison with related genres or types of discourse.

I count four of those with which utopia seems closely related: the manifesto; the constitution; the ‘mirror for princes’; and great prophecy, which includes within itself that mode called satire, the denunciation of the fallen and sinful world—which Robert C. Elliott saw as the modal opposite number of the utopian text, and which is inscribed in Book One of More’s *Utopia* itself.⁴ Indeed, two of the other genres leave specific traces there as well. Book One relates the conversation of the traveller Hythloday with More and his friends, a conversation that will eventuate in Hythloday’s description of Utopia itself in Book Two (written, however, earlier than Book One). For Book One offers a savage satire on the evils of the age, one that verges on prophecy.⁵ It rules out the mirror for princes, insofar as Hythloday refuses the opportunities of the court and the possibility of being an advisor to the monarch; it fails to identify any fundamental agency for radical change, and thus falls generically short of

⁴ Robert C. Elliott, *The Shape of Utopia*, Chicago 1970; see also *The Power of Satire*, Princeton 1960. It is, however, important to distinguish between the anti-utopia (the expression of the fiercely anti-utopian and anti-revolutionary ideology for which utopias inevitably lead to repression and dictatorship, to conformity and boredom) and the dystopia (termed ‘critical dystopia’ by Tom Moylan in his useful *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, Boulder, co 2000), which is necessarily a critique of tendencies at work in capitalism today. Perhaps we need to add the ‘revolt against utopia’ to this generic system.

⁵ ‘Your sheep . . . which are usually so tame and so cheaply fed, begin now, according to report, to be so greedy and wild that they devour human beings themselves and devastate and depopulate fields, houses, and towns’: More, *Complete Works*, vol. iv, p. 67.

Althusser's prescription for the manifesto (which included Machiavelli's *Prince*, a text written almost at the same time as More's *Utopia*).⁶ And as for the writing of constitutions—a pastime which reached its zenith in the revolutionary eighteenth century, but which is apparently still practised today (by Giscard d'Estaing, for example)—the institutions of Book Two faintly echo such practices, but with what seems to me a basic difference. If individual laws are composed to rule out or prevent certain specific actions, performatively identified as crimes, I would hazard the proposition that constitutions are also composed in order to prevent certain events from happening; but that those events are collective rather than individual. Indeed, it is enough to cast a glance at the most successful of all constitutions, namely that of the us, to understand what kinds of collective events it is designed to prevent. Constitutions come into being in order to forestall revolutions as such, and to prevent disorder and radical social change. It was clearly a generic category mistake for Jefferson to try to incorporate the right to rebel into this kind of document; but as utopia is already beyond history, the qualifications and provisions that the genre of constitution-framing takes to prevent it are superfluous. It is only in the present age that narratives have emerged in which characters stage a revolution against utopia itself—and in which this process is felt to be more satisfying than the founding of utopia in the first place.

There is no space here to explore the properly literary analyses—discursive, structural or semiotic—of these diverse genres and modes, or to report more concretely on what they tell us about the one in question: the utopian text. What can be said is that such analysis helps to determine the particular relationship to the political as such, entertained not only by utopia as a text but by utopian thinking and impulses generally. It is a peculiar and a paradoxical relationship, as I have already hinted; utopia is either too political or not political enough. Both reproaches are common and current—and recall the ominous moment in Hythloday's chronicle in which he tells us that political discussions outside the Senate are punishable by death, something fortunately not so common in our world.⁷ But the reasons are clear enough: in utopia, politics is supposed to be over, along with History. Factionalism, parties, subgroups, special interests, must be excluded in the name of the General Will. For the one

⁶ Louis Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, London 1999.

⁷ More, *Complete Works*, vol. iv, p. 125.

thing that cannot be challenged or changed is the system itself: and this is in fact the fundamental presupposition of all systems, of democracy fully as much as of communism. You cannot abolish parliamentary representation in a parliamentary system; you cannot decide to go back to free enterprise in a communist one; cooperatives cannot flourish within a capitalist market system; nepotism, inheritance and *nomenklatura* cannot be tolerated within a society committed to equality. A social system, in order to continue to function, must include its own built-in immunities: how much the more so, in the case of the system to end all systems? Yet this exclusion of politics is not at all incompatible with the 'permanent revolutions' of another kind of politics: the eternal squabbling and bickering, the never-ending debates and discussions, that fill up Kim Stanley Robinson's town council sessions⁸ or Ernest Callenbach's Survivalist Party meetings; the interminable airing of differences that inspired Raymond Williams to observe that socialism would be much more complicated than capitalism, and caused Oscar Wilde to complain that the former 'took too many evenings'. Though when we come to the dialectics of utopia, we will see that these very differences, which seem to oppose More to Callenbach and to *Ecotopia*'s 'enormous army of lawyers', can also be read in a rather different light.⁹

Mental play

How should we then formulate the position of utopia with respect to the political? I would like to suggest the following: that utopia emerges at the moment of the suspension of the political; I am almost tempted to say of its excision, or better still, borrowing Lacanian jargon to convey its strange externality from the social field, its extimacy; or even, to borrow the figure that Derrida derives from the Abraham-Torok analysis of Freud's Wolf-Man, its 'encryption'.¹⁰ But are figures really the right way of conveying this peculiar autonomy of the political, sealed and forgotten

⁸ Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Pacific Edge*, New York 1990.

⁹ Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia*, Berkeley 1973, p. 110. Or compare Edmund Burke on the social background of the revolutionaries: 'The general composition was of obscure provincial advocates, of stewards of petty local jurisdictions, country attorneys, notaries, the fomenters and conductors of the petty war of village vexation. From the moment I read the list, I saw distinctly, and very nearly as it has happened, all that was to follow': *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790).

¹⁰ Thus, it seems possible to ground Stephen Greenblatt's well-known account of Thomas More's sense of irreality in just such an isolation or 'encryption' of the political. See *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, London 1980.

like a cyst within the social as such? Perhaps it will be easier to start by saying: politics is always with us, and it is always historical, always in the process of changing, of evolving, of disintegrating and deteriorating. I want to convey a situation in which political institutions seem both unchangeable and infinitely modifiable: no agency has appeared on the horizon that offers the slightest chance or hope of modifying the status quo, and yet in the mind—and perhaps for that very reason—all kinds of institutional variations and re-combinations seem thinkable.

What I am calling political institutions are thus the object and the raw material of a ceaseless mental play, like those home-mechanics construction sets I spoke of; and yet there is not the slightest prospect of reform, let alone revolution, in real life. And when I suggested that this reality paralysis might, in fact, be the precondition of the new, purely intellectual and constructivist freedom, the paradox might be explained this way: that as one approaches periods of genuine pre-revolutionary ferment, when the system really seems in the process of losing its legitimacy, when the ruling elite is palpably uncertain of itself and full of divisions and self-doubts, when popular demands grow louder and more confident, then what also happens is that those grievances and demands grow more precise in their insistence and urgency. We focus more sharply on very specific wrongs, the dysfunctioning of the system becomes far more tangibly visible at crucial points. But at such a moment the utopian imagination no longer has free play: political thinking and intelligence are trained on very sharply focused issues, they have concrete content, the situation claims us in all its historical uniqueness as a configuration; and the wide-ranging drifts and digressions of political speculation give way to practical programmes (even if the latter are hopelessly unrealizable and ‘utopian’ in the other, dismissive sense).¹¹

¹¹ Perry Anderson reminds me that in fact some of the most extreme utopianisms emerge from the very centre of the revolutionary upheaval itself: yet Winstanley's vision (in the English revolution) may be said to form the ideological guidelines of what is today called an ‘intentional community’; while Sade's *‘Français, encore un effort’* (*La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, 1795) could more accurately be described as a counter-cultural thought experiment, and Babeuf's was a political programme as such. We might also want to reflect on the differences between utopias which, emerging within a so-called bourgeois revolution, implicitly denounce the latter's inevitable limits; and those which prolong socialist revolutions in what they believe to be the latter's own direction and spirit (Chayanov; Platonov's *Chevengur*; even Yefremov's *Andromeda*).

Is this to say any more than that, when it comes to politics, utopianism is utterly impractical in the first place? But we can also frame the conditions of possibility for such impractical speculation in a positive way. After all, most of human history has unfolded in situations of general impotence and powerlessness, when this or that system of state power is firmly in place, and no revolts seem even conceivable, let alone possible or imminent. Those stretches of human history are for the most part passed in utterly non-utopian conditions, in which none of the images of the future or of radical difference peculiar to utopias ever reach the surface.

Periodizing imagination

We need, then, to posit a peculiar suspension of the political in order to describe the utopian moment: it is this suspension, this separation of the political—in all its unchangeable immobility—from daily life and even from the world of the lived and the existential, this externality that serves as the calm before the storm, the stillness at the centre of the hurricane; and that allows us to take hitherto unimaginable mental liberties with structures whose actual modification or abolition scarcely seem on the cards. I am trying to characterize the situation of Thomas More, on the eve of capitalism (in Louis Marin's account), or on that of the absolute monarchies and the emergence of the new nation states (in Phillip Wegner's);¹² to characterize the eighteenth century itself, and Rousseau's endless fantasies about new constitutions—fantasies that seem to have absorbed him as completely as the romantic and libidinal ones we also associate with his name, but which emerge in a situation in which the great revolution, only a few years away, is still utterly unimaginable. I am thinking, too, of the great utopian production of the populist and progressive era in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century; and finally of the utopianism of the 1960s. These are all periods of great social ferment but seemingly rudderless, without any agency or direction: reality seems malleable, but not the system; and it is that very distance of the unchangeable system from the turbulent restlessness of the real world that seems to open up a moment of ideational and utopian-creative free play in the mind itself or in the

¹² Louis Marin, *Utopiques*, Paris 1973; Phillip Wegner, *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation and the Spatial Histories of Modernity*, California 2002. See also J. C. Davis's disturbing yet suggestive notion that utopias proleptically express the future 'total' welfare state: *Utopia and the Ideal Society*, Cambridge 1981.

political imagination. If this conveys any kind of plausible picture of the historical situation in which utopias are possible, then it remains only to wonder whether it does not also correspond to that of our own time.

So utopianism involves a certain distance from the political institutions which encourages an endless play of fantasy around their possible reconstructions and restructurations. But what is the content of those fantasies? As in Freud's analysis of dreams, there is the satisfaction of secondary elaboration or interminable overdetermination; but there is also the implacable pressure of the unconscious wish or desire. Can we neglect that wish, without missing everything that gives utopia its vitality and its libidinal and existential claims on us? Probably not; and I therefore hope to offer a very simple answer to this question, one that does not use the words 'more perfect' or 'the general good', happiness, satisfaction, fulfilment, or any of those other conventional slogans.

First, though, it is necessary to explain a second complicated position, one that has perplexed both my readers and those of Louis Marin's great book on the subject which inspired many of my own thoughts. It is that utopia is somehow negative; and that it is most authentic when we cannot imagine it. Its function lies not in helping us to imagine a better future but rather in demonstrating our utter incapacity to imagine such a future—our imprisonment in a non-utopian present without historicity or futurity—so as to reveal the ideological closure of the system in which we are somehow trapped and confined. This is, to be sure, a peculiarly defeatist position for any self-respecting and full-blooded utopian to take, let alone defend, and one is tempted to evoke nihilism or neurosis; it is certainly rather un-American in spirit. Yet I think I can defend its essential reasonableness by dealing with it under two heads: ideology and fear.

Standpoint of dreams

The point about ideology is not a particularly complicated one: it sets out from the conviction that we are all ideologically situated, we are all shackled to an ideological subject-position, we are all determined by class and class history, even when we try to resist or escape it. And for those unfamiliar with this ideological perspectivism or class standpoint theory, it is perhaps necessary to add that it holds for everyone, left or right,

progressive or reactionary, worker as well as boss, and underclasses, marginals, ethnic or gender victims, fully as much as for the ethnic, race or gender mainstreams.

This situation has an interesting consequence in the present context: it means, not only that all utopias spring from a specific class position, but that their fundamental thematization—the root-of-all-evil diagnosis in terms of which they are each framed—will also reflect a specific class-historical standpoint or perspective. The utopian, to be sure, imagines his effort as one of rising above all immediate determinations in some all-embracing resolution of every imaginable evil and misery of our own fallen society and reality. Such was, for example, the immense utopian imagination of Charles Fourier, the Hegel of socio-political speculation and a figure whose fantasy-energy sought to encompass all possible characterological variants in his extraordinary system. But Fourier was a petty bourgeois; and even the farthest *épicycle de Mercure*, even the most capacious Absolute Spirit, remains an ideological one. No matter how comprehensive and trans-class or post-ideological the inventory of reality's flaws and defects, the imagined resolution necessarily remains wedded to this or that ideological perspective.

This explains much about the various debates and differences that have peopled the history of utopian thought. Most often they come in pairs or opposites, and I would like to recapitulate a few of them—beginning, perhaps, with some of the examples already touched on: my own fantasy about universal employment, for instance. For an equally strong utopian case can be made for the elimination of labour altogether, for a 'jobless future' in which the absence of labour is joyously utopian: did not Marx's own son-in-law write a book called *The Right to Be Lazy*? And was not one of the central ideas of the 1960s (Marcuse's) the prospect of a wonder-working technology that would eliminate alienated labour worldwide?¹³ We can see the same opposition at work in the very deployment of the terms 'politics' and 'the political' in the utopian context: for have we not demonstrated that some utopians long for the end of the political altogether, while others revel in the prospect of an eternity of political wrangling, of argufying promoted to the very essence of a collective social life?

¹³ See *Eros and Civilization*, Boston 1974.

City and country

Are such oppositions to be taken as mere differences of opinion, characterological symptoms, or do they betray some more fundamental dynamic in the utopian process? A few years ago—when nature still existed and our unevenly developing societies still knew such a thing as the countryside and a vocation of farmers and peasants that was not mere industrial field-work in agribusiness—one of the most durable oppositions in utopian projection (and Science-Fiction writing) was that between country and city. Did your fantasies revolve around a return to the countryside and the rural commune, or were they on the other hand incorrigibly urban, unwilling and unable to do without the excitement of the great metropolis, with its crowds and its multiple offerings, from sexuality and consumer goods to culture? It is an opposition one could emblemize with many names: Heidegger versus Sartre, for example, or in sf LeGuin versus Delany. Perhaps its more contemporary form involves a relationship to technology and a correspondingly diminishing nostalgia for nature; or, on the other hand, a passionate ecological commitment to the prehistory of the earth and an ever-feeblower pride in the Promethean triumph over the non-human. At this point, gender also enters the utopian picture, and it is worth noting the abundance of feminist utopias since the second wave of feminism in the 1960s; whether the utopias of male bonding have anything as rich to offer may not be exactly the right question to ask, although I would think that the recrudescence of military sf and the hierarchical satisfactions of warrior communities might be one place to look.

Perhaps the most momentous specification of this opposition between the country and the city—a shift into another register, which does not guarantee that the proponents of each term remain ideologically committed to the same position when they change floors, so to speak—is that between planning and organic growth. It is of course an old staple of political and ideological argument, which goes back at least as far as Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*; indeed, as far back as that revolution itself, which seemed, for the first time in human history, to assert the primacy of the human will over social institutions and the power of human beings—of one human being? or of a party? of a class? of a general will?—to reshape and fashion society according to a plan, an abstract idea or ideal. Burke's thunderous denunciation of this hubris affirms the power of time, of slow growth, of

culture in its etymological sense, and therefore seems to come down firmly on the side of the country. But today perhaps things stand otherwise, and it is the city and the urban that grows wild like the state of nature (when did the expression 'jungle' begin to be applied to its 'mysteries?'); whereas it is nature which has, in late capitalism and the green revolution—but perhaps all the way back to the original neolithic revolution itself—been subject to careful planning and engineering. In any case, the notion of the market as an untrammelled natural growth has returned with a vengeance into political thinking, while Left ecology desperately tries to assess the possibilities of a productive collaboration between political agency and the earth. Time and space are equally at stake here: for the plan is also pre-eminently an organization of that time which the Burkean conservative wished to abandon to its own inner tempos and rhythms, letting it be in its being, as Heidegger might have said; even as its infernal machine—the temporality of the market—steadily devours the space that ecological planners wished to isolate and release in turn to the logic of its own spatiality. As we have known since Polanyi's classic *Great Transformation*, the establishment of untrammelled market freedom requires enormous government intervention; and the same can more obviously be affirmed, and by its own admission, for any ecological politics.

The weaker alternative, in our time at least, is the term standing in for nature, affirmed unacceptably as human nature in the free-market idiom. Ecology seems to count ever more feebly on its power—unless it be in the form of the apocalyptic and of catastrophe, global warming or the development of new viruses. Everything that today seems outmoded in traditional utopias seeks to redress this balance—to strengthen versions of Nature that are no longer persuasive, in an age when lawns and landscapes and the other archetypes of natural beauty have become commodities systemically manufactured (and when the former 'human nature' has proven equally malleable and fungible).

Two more characteristic oppositions shape present-day utopian thought: one is the intelligent fantasy of what we may call a Franciscan utopia, that is to say, a utopia of scarcity and poverty, based on the obvious fact that the planet is less and less able to support human, let alone other forms of life; and on the conviction that rich societies like the us will need to convert to another kind of ethic if the world is not to end up, as it currently seems destined to do, in the spectacle of a First-World

gated community surrounded by a world of starving enemies. Indeed, the assessment itself reawakens the old antithesis between asceticism and pleasure, so deeply rooted in the revolutionary tradition as well as the utopian one. But even this opposition should not be grasped ethically or characterologically. My proposal will involve neither a choice between these extremes nor some 'synthesis' of them; but rather a stubbornly negative relationship to both, whose groundwork I laid in speaking of ideology.

For it will be understood that, taken individually, in isolation from its opposite number, each of these utopian positions cannot but be profoundly ideological. Taken one by one, each term is substantive; its very content reflects a class standpoint which is ideological by definition. Or, if you prefer, each finds itself necessarily transmitted through, and expressed by, the social experience of the utopian thinker, which cannot but be a class experience and reflect a particular class perspective on society as a whole. Nor does this inevitable class perspective in itself imply a political judgement: for the utopian fantasies of the poor and disadvantaged are as ideological and as laden with *ressentiment* as those of the masters and the privileged.

But what these utopian oppositions allow us to do is, by way of negation, to grasp the moment of truth of each term. Put the other way around, the value of each term is differential, it lies not in its own substantive content but as an ideological critique of its opposite number. The truth of the vision of nature lies in the way in which it discloses the complacency of the urban celebration; but the opposite is also true, and the vision of the city exposes everything nostalgic and impoverished in the embrace of nature. Another way of thinking about the matter is the reminder that each of these utopias is a fantasy, and has precisely the value of a fantasy—something not realized and indeed unrealizable in that partial form. Yet the operation does not conform to that stereotype of the dialectic in which the two opposites are ultimately united in some impossible synthesis (or what Greimas calls the 'complex term'). If dialectical, then this one is a negative dialectic in which each term persists in its negation of the other; it is in their double negation that the genuine political and philosophic content is to be located. But the two terms must not cancel each other out; their disappearance would leave us back in that status quo, that realm of current being which it was the function and value

of the utopian fantasy to have negated in the first place; indeed—as we have now been able to observe—to have doubly negated.

Terror of obliteration

Is this to say that we can form no substantive or positive picture of utopia, short of embracing all the multiple contradictory pictures that coexist in our collective social unconscious? I want to conclude by looking at the fear of utopia, of the anxiety with which the utopian impulse confronts us. But first I want to inscribe the one answer to the substantive question that seems to me sober and to have the appropriate solemnity owing to its incorporation of the very problem of this unanswerable question itself: something like a zero-degree utopian formulation. Predictably this thoughtful answer is Adorno's, and it runs as follows:

He who asks what is the goal of an emancipated society is given answers such as the fulfilment of human possibilities or the richness of life. Just as the inevitable question is illegitimate, so the repellent assurance of the answer is [as] inevitable [as it is ideologically dated] . . . There is tenderness only in the coarsest demand: that no-one shall go hungry any more. Every other seeks to apply to a condition that ought to be determined by human needs, a mode of human conduct adapted to production as an end in itself.¹⁴

In another place, Adorno clarifies the self-interest implicit in this final judgement philosophically, by suggesting that the ideological prejudices and characterological deformations of class society are the mark of the so-called instinct of self-preservation with which it indoctrinates us.¹⁵ Utopia will then be characterized by the falling away of that imperious drive towards self-preservation, now rendered unnecessary.

This is no doubt a frightening thought, and not only on account of the vulnerability and the mortal dangers to which it exposes us. And it is to that fear that I would now like to turn. It is a discussion that needs to go well beyond introductory lessons in ideological analysis, demanding that we confront the more all-encompassing anxieties that necessarily greet or overwhelm any prospect of total systemic change.

¹⁴ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, London 1974, pp. 155–6.

¹⁵ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Stanford 2002, pp. 22–3.

The science-fictional figure for such change is the situation in which a prisoner, or some potential rescue victim, is warned that salvation will be possible only at the price of allowing the entire personality—the past and its memories, all the multiple influences and events that have combined to form this current personality in the present—to be wiped away without a trace: a consciousness will alone remain, after this operation, but by what effort of the reason or imagination can it still be called ‘the same’ consciousness? The fear with which this prospect immediately fills us is then to all intents and purposes the same as the fear of death, and it is not for nothing that Adorno evoked self-preservation.

Pleasures and compulsions

Something like this is the anxiety with which utopia confronts us, and it is not uninstructive to pursue its paradoxes for a moment longer. Is it not possible that the achievement of utopia will efface all previously existing utopian impulses? For as we have seen they are all formed and determined by the traits and ideologies imposed on us by our present condition, which will by then have disappeared without a trace. But what we call our personality is made up of these very things, of the miseries and the deformations, fully as much as the pleasures and fulfilments. I fear that we are not capable of imagining the disappearance of the former without the utter extinction of the latter as well, since the two are inextricably and causally bound together. In matters of existential experience there is no picking and choosing, no separation of the wheat from the chaff. I want to offer two more figural examples of this dilemma here: the lessons of addiction and of sexuality.

Indeed, no society has ever been quite so addictive, quite so inseparable from the condition of addictiveness as this one, which did not invent gambling, to be sure, but which did invent compulsive consumption. The postmodern, or late capitalism, has at least brought the epistemological benefit of revealing the ultimate structure of the commodity to be that of addiction itself (or, if you prefer, it has produced the very concept of addiction in all its metaphysical richness). What would it be for the addict to desire a cure? Surely only this or that form of bad faith or self-deception: like that neurotic (I think it is Sartre’s example) who begins analysis only in order to break it off after a few sessions, thereby demonstrating to his satisfaction that he is in fact incurable.

As for sexuality, since it is apparently more natural than addiction, an even more dramatic case can be made by quoting those anthropological commentators who suggest that, although omnipresent—probably even because of its omnipresence—sexuality in tribal societies was not a very significant matter; comparable in fact to that very glass of water to which the modern proverb cynically compares it. In other words sexuality, itself a meaningless biological fact, is in such societies far less invested with all the symbolic meanings with which we modern and sophisticated people endow it. What would it mean, then, from within our own sexualized existentiality, to imagine a human sexuality that was so unrepressed, yet so utterly divested of the multiple satisfactions of meaning as such? LeGuin usefully dramatizes the consequences the other way round, by way of the planet Winter, inhabited by an androgynous population that differentiates sexually only at fixed temporal periods (the way animals go into heat). The reflexions of the first visitor to this planet are instructive:

The First Mobile [Ambassador], if one is sent, must be warned that unless he is very self-assured, or senile, his pride will suffer. A man wants his virility regarded, a woman wants her femininity appreciated, however indirect and subtle the indications of regard and appreciation. On Winter they will not exist. One is respected and judged only as a human being. It is an appalling experience.¹⁶

Something is to be said for the proposition that the fear of utopia is intimately linked with the fear of aphanisis, or loss of desire: the sexlessness of utopians is a constant in the anti-utopian tradition, as witness John Boorman's well-known film *Zardoz*. But something is also to be said for the idea that the features I have mentioned, addictiveness and sexuality, are the very emblems of human culture as such, the very supplements that define us as something other than mere animals: competitiveness and passion or frenzy—are these not what paradoxically make up the mind or spirit itself, as opposed to the merely physical and material? In this sense, it is only too humanly comprehensible that we might draw back from that utopia which Adorno described as a community of 'good animals'. On the other hand, it also seems possible that a genuine confrontation with utopia demands just such anxieties, and that without them our visions of alternative futures and utopian transformations remain politically and existentially inoperative, mere thought experiments and mental games without any visceral commitment.

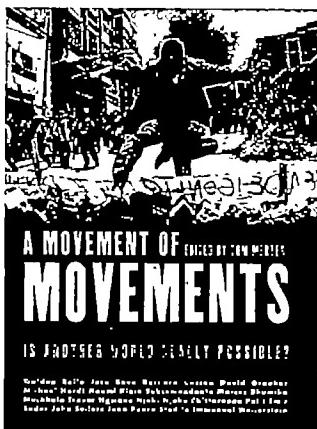
¹⁶ Ursula K. LeGuin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, New York 1969, p. 95.

I have hoped to convey something that I have not yet said: namely that utopias are non-fictional, even though they are also non-existent. Utopias in fact come to us as barely audible messages from a future that may never come into being. I leave the articulation of that message to Marge Piercy's Mattapoisett utopians—time-travellers from a future which, they warn us, without ourselves and our own present, may never come into existence:

You may fail us . . . You individually may fail to understand us or to struggle in your own life and time. You of your time may fail to struggle altogether . . . [But] we must fight to come to exist, to remain in existence, to be the future that happens. That's why we reached you.¹⁷

¹⁷ Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time*, New York 1976, pp. 197–8.

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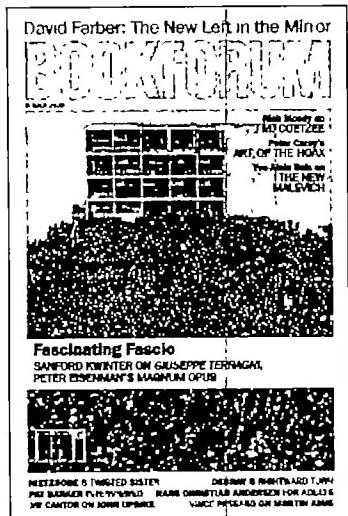
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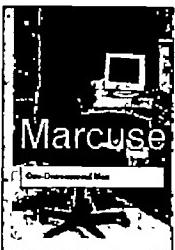
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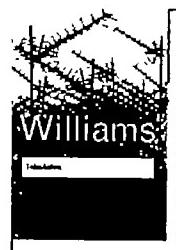
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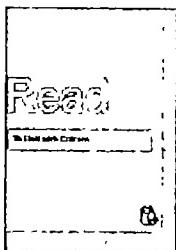
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ROBERT BRENNER

NEW BOOM OR NEW BUBBLE?

The Trajectory of the US Economy

IN EARLY 2002 Alan Greenspan declared that the American recession which had begun a year earlier was at an end. By the fall the Fed was obliged to backtrack, admitting that the economy was still in difficulties and deflation a threat. In June 2003 Greenspan was still conceding that 'the economy has yet to exhibit sustainable growth'. Since then Wall Street economists have been proclaiming, with ever fewer qualifications, that after various interruptions attributable to 'external shocks'—9/11, corporate scandals and the attack on Iraq—the economy is finally accelerating. Pointing to the reality of faster growth of GDP in the second half of 2003, and a significant increase in profits, they assure us that a new boom has arrived. The question that therefore imposes itself, with a Presidential election less than a year away, is the real condition of the US economy.¹ What triggered the slowdown that took place? What is driving the current economic acceleration, and is it sustainable? Has the economy finally broken beyond the long downturn, which has brought ever worse global performance decade by decade since 1973? What is the outlook going forward?

In mid-summer 2000, the US stock market began a sharp descent and the underlying economy rapidly lost steam, falling into recession by early 2001.² Every previous cyclical downturn of the post-war period had been detonated by a tightening of credit on the part of the Federal Reserve, to contain inflation and economic overheating by reducing consumer demand and, in turn, expenditure on investment. But in this case, uniquely, the Fed dramatically eased credit, yet two closely inter-related forces drove the economy downward. The first of these was worsening over-capacity, mainly in manufacturing, which depressed

prices and capacity utilization, leading to falling profitability—which in turn reduced employment, cut investment and repressed wage increases. The second was a collapse of equity prices, especially in high technology lines, which sent the ‘wealth effect’ into reverse, making it harder for corporations to raise money by issuing shares or incurring bank debt, and for households to borrow against stock.

I. THE END OF THE BOOM

The recession brought an end to the decade-long expansion that began in 1991 and, in particular, the five-year economic acceleration that began in 1995. That boom was, and continues to be, much hyped, especially as the scene of an ostensible productivity growth miracle.³ In fact, it brought no break from the long downturn that has plagued the world economy since 1973. Above all, in the US, as well as Japan and Germany, the rates of profit in the private economy as a whole failed to revive. The rates for the 1990s business cycle failed to surpass those of the 1970s and 1980s, which were of course well below those of the long post-war boom between the end of the 1940s and end of the 1960s. As a consequence, the economic performance during the 1990s of the

¹ I wish to thank Aaron Brenner and Tom Mertes for much help on both content and style. I am also grateful to Andrew Glyn for data on inventories for Germany and Japan and Dean Baker for very useful advice on data sources.

² The National Bureau of Economic Research declared a recession to have begun in February 2001 and to have ended in November 2001. In this text, I use the term recession only in the formal sense of the NBER. Otherwise, I generally speak of slowdown, to refer to the economic slackening that was set off by developments in the second half of 2000 and continued till mid-2003, at least.

³ Typical in this respect is Joseph Stiglitz, ‘The Roaring Nineties’, *The Atlantic Monthly*, October 2002. Despite his self-described role as critic of the bubble economy, this much-admired Nobel Prize winning economist is in fact exemplary of the Wall Street publicity machine in refusing to be moved by mere numbers. As chair of the Council of Economic Advisers, he would appear to have been well placed to discover basic government data on the economy. But he states, preposterously, that ‘the height of the 1990s boom’ was ‘a period of unprecedented growth’ with ‘productivity levels that exceeded even those of the boom following World War II’. In reality, in terms of all the standard economic variables, economic performance in the *half decade* 1995–2000 was weaker than in the *entire quarter-century* 1948–73. The average annual rate of labour productivity growth in the non-farm business economy for 1995–2000, at 2.5 per cent, was well below that for 1948–73, at 2.9 per cent. ‘Multifactor Productivity Trends, 2001’, *BLS News*, 8 April 2003, p. 6, Table B (available on the BLS website). See also *The Boom and the Bubble*, London 2002, p. 221, Table 9.1.

advanced capitalist economies taken together (G7), in terms of the standard macroeconomic indicators, was no better than that of the 1980s, which was in turn less good than that of the 1970s, which itself could not compare to the booming 1950s and 1960s.⁴

What continued to repress private-sector profitability and prevent any durable economic boom was the perpetuation of a long-term international—that is, systemic—problem of over-capacity in the manufacturing sector. This found expression in the deep dip of—already much reduced—manufacturing profitability in both Germany and Japan during the 1990s, and in the inability of US manufacturers to sustain the impressive recovery in their rates of profit between 1985 and 1995 much past mid-decade. It was manifested too in the series of increasingly deep and pervasive crises that struck the world economy in the last decade of the century—Europe's ERM collapse in 1993, the Mexican shocks of 1994–95, the East Asian emergency of 1997–98, and the crash and recession of 2000–01.

The roots of the slowdown, and more generally the configuration of the US economy today, go back to the mid-1990s, when the main forces shaping the economy of *both* the boom of 1995–2000 *and* the slowdown of 2000–03 were unleashed. During the previous decade, helped out by huge revaluations of the yen and the mark imposed by the US government on its Japanese and German rivals at the time of the 1985 Plaza Accord, US manufacturing profitability had made a significant recovery, after a long period in the doldrums, increasing by a full 70 per cent between 1985 and 1995. With the rate of profit outside of manufacturing actually falling slightly in this period, this rise in the manufacturing profit rate brought about, *on its own*, a quite major increase in profitability for the US private economy as a whole, lifting the non-financial corporate profit rate by 20 per cent over the course of the decade, and regaining its level of 1973. On the basis of this revival, the US economy began to accelerate from about 1993, exhibiting—at least on the surface—greater dynamism than it had in many years.

Nevertheless, the prospects for the American economy were ultimately limited by the condition of the world economy as a whole. The recovery of US profitability was based not only on dollar devaluation, but a decade of close to zero real wage growth, serious industrial shake-out, declining

⁴ See *The Boom and the Bubble*, p. 47, Table I.10.

real interest rates, and a turn to balanced budgets. It therefore came very much at the expense of its major rivals, who were hard hit both by the slowed growth of the us market and the improved price competitiveness of us firms in the global economy. It led, during the first half of the 1990s, to the deepest recessions of the post-war epoch in both Japan and Germany, rooted in manufacturing crises in both countries. In 1995, as the Japanese manufacturing sector threatened to freeze up when the exchange rate of the yen rose to 79 to the dollar, the us was obliged to return the favour bestowed upon it a decade earlier by Japan and Germany, agreeing to trigger, in coordination with its partners, a new rise of the dollar. It cannot be overstressed that, with the precipitous ascent of the dollar which ensued between 1995 and 2001, the us economy was deprived of the main motor that had been responsible for its impressive turnaround during the previous decade—viz. the sharp improvement in its manufacturing profitability, international competitiveness and export performance. This in turn set the stage for the dual trends that would shape the American economy throughout the rest of the decade and right up to this day. The first of these was the deepening crisis of the us manufacturing sector, of exports, and (after 2000) of investment; the second was the uninterrupted growth of private-sector debt, household consumption, imports and asset prices, which would make for the sustained expansion of a significant portion of the non-manufacturing sector—above all finance, but also such debt-, import- and consumption-dependent industries as construction, retail trade and health services.

Stock-market Keynesianism

As the dollar skyrocketed after 1995, the burden of international overcapacity shifted to the us. Matters were made much worse for us manufacturers when the East Asian economies entered into crisis in 1997–98, leading to the drying up of East Asian demand, the devaluation of East Asian currencies, and East Asian distress-selling on the world market. From 1997, the us manufacturing profit rate entered a major new decline. Yet, even as manufacturing profitability fell, the us stock market took off. It was initially driven upward by a precipitous decline of long-term interest rates in 1995, which resulted from a huge influx of money from East Asian governments into us financial markets, pushing up the dollar. It was systematically sustained to the end of the decade by the loose-money regime of Alan Greenspan at the Fed, who refused to raise interest rates between early 1995 and mid-1999

and came vigorously to the aid of the equity markets with injections of credit at every sign of financial instability. Greenspan was acutely conscious of the depressive impact on the economy of both Clinton's moves to balance the budget and the new take-off of the dollar. He therefore looked to the wealth effect of the stock market to offset these by jacking up corporate and household borrowing, and thereby investment and consumer demand. In effect, the Federal Reserve replaced the increase in the public deficit that was so indispensable to us economic growth during the 1980s, with an increase in the private deficit during the second half of the 1990s—a kind of 'stock-market Keynesianism'.⁵

Once equity prices took off, corporations—especially in information technology—found themselves with unprecedentedly easy access to finance, either through borrowing against the collateral ostensibly represented by their stock-market capitalization or the issuance of shares. As a consequence, the borrowing of non-financial corporations skyrocketed, approaching record levels by the end of the decade. Whereas throughout the post-war epoch, corporations had financed themselves almost entirely out of retained earnings (profits after interest and dividends), now firms that could not borrow cheaply turned to the equity market for funds to an extent that had previously been inconceivable. On these foundations, investment exploded upwards, increasing at an average annual rate of about 10 per cent and explaining, in growth accounting terms, about 30 per cent of the increase in GDP between 1995 and 2000.

Rich households also benefited from the wealth effect of runaway equity prices. As they saw their paper assets soar, they felt justified in raising their annual borrowing, as well as their outstanding debt, to near record levels as a fraction of household income. They also felt free to raise their household consumption as a proportion of personal income to near 100 per cent, bringing about a parallel reduction in the us household savings rate from 8 per cent to near zero over the course of the decade.⁶ Consumer expenditures jumped sharply, helping mightily to soak up

⁵ Greenspan's deliberate reliance on the wealth effect of the stock market can be seen in his public statements of the period, especially his testimonies before the Joint Economic Committee of Congress in June and July 1998.

⁶ The top 20 per cent of families by income were entirely responsible for the fall in the household savings rate during the 1990s. See Dean Maki and Michael Palumbo, 'Disentangling the Wealth Effect: A Cohort Analysis of Household Saving in the 1990s', Federal Reserve Finance and Discussion Series, April 2001 (Federal Reserve website).

the increased output generated by rising investment and productivity. Between 1995 and 2000, a powerful boom took shape, marked by an acceleration of output, productivity, employment and, eventually, real wage growth. But this boom was almost entirely dependent upon a stock market run-up that had no basis in underlying returns to corporations.

Occurring as it did in the face of the downward trend in profitability—and made possible by increases in corporate borrowing and household consumption that were both dependent upon the stock market bubble—much of the growth in investment of the second half of the decade was inevitably misallocated. The scope and depth of over-capacity was thus very much extended, especially into high-technology industries both within and outside of the manufacturing sector, exacerbating the decline in profitability. Across the economy, the reductions in the growth of costs that resulted from increased productivity were more than offset by the deceleration of price increases that stemmed from the outrunning of demand by supply. Consumers thus ended up as the primary—if only temporary—beneficiaries of a self-undermining process that brought inexorably increasing downward pressure on profits. Between 1997 and 2000, as both the boom and the bubble reached their apogee, the non-financial corporate sector as a whole sustained a fall in profit rate of almost one-fifth.

II. CRISIS OF MANUFACTURING AND HIGH-TECH

But neither the ascent of the real economy, nor that of its on-paper representation in the form of asset prices, could long defy the gravitational pull of falling returns. From July 2000, a series of ever-worsening corporate earning reports precipitated a sharp cyclical downturn, both by reversing the wealth effect and by revealing the mass of redundant productive capacity and mountain of corporate indebtedness that constituted the dual legacy of the bubble-driven investment boom. With their market capitalization sharply reduced, firms not only found it more difficult to borrow, but less attractive to do so, especially since declining profits and the growing threat of bankruptcy led them to try to repair balance sheets overburdened by debt. Having purchased far more plant, equipment and software than they could profitably set in motion, they were obliged either to reduce prices or leave capacity unused, sustaining falling profit rates either way. To cope with declining profitability, firms cut back on

output and capital expenditures, while reducing employment and wage growth so as to bring down costs. Across the economy these moves radically reduced aggregate demand, pushing the economy downward, while exacerbating profitability decline by depressing capacity utilization and productivity growth. The relentless burden of interest payments on the huge overhang of corporate debt compressed profits even further. Between the year ending in mid-2000 and the year ending in mid-2001, GDP growth fell from 5 per cent to minus 1 per cent per annum and investment from 9 per cent to minus 5 per cent—in both cases faster than at any other time since World War II—sending the economy into a tail-spin.

In 2001, 2002 and the first half of 2003, employment in the non-farm economy (measured in hours and including the self-employed) fell by 2 per cent, 2.5 per cent and 1.5 per cent respectively, after having increased at an average annual rate of more than 2 per cent between 1995 and 2000. This in itself entailed an enormous hit to aggregate demand, an inexorable and persistent downward pull on the economy. Simultaneously real hourly wages, which had grown 3.5 per cent in 2000, were brutally cut back—to minus 0.1 percent, 1.2 per cent and 0.3 per cent, respectively, in 2001, 2002 and the first half of 2003. As a result of the combination of reduced hourly wage growth and falling employment, total real non-farm compensation—the main element of aggregate demand—fell by 1.2 per cent, 1.4 per cent and 0.2 per cent, respectively, in 2001, 2002 and the first half of 2003, after increasing at an average annual pace of 4.3 per cent between 1995 and 2000. Perhaps most striking of all, after having grown at an average annual rate of 10 per cent between 1995 and 2000, real expenditures on plant and equipment fell sharply in 2001 and 2002, and were flat in the first half of 2003. All else being equal, these huge blows to consumer and investment demand, resulting from the mammoth reductions in employment, compensation and capital spending growth, would have kept the economy in or near recession right into the present. As it was, even in the face of the government's enormous stimulus programme, they were responsible for driving average annual growth of non-farm GDP from 4.6 per cent between 1995 and 2000 to minus 0.1 per cent in 2001, and preventing it from going higher than 2.7 per cent in 2002 and 2.6 per cent in the first half of 2003.

Exacerbating the downturn, US overseas sales also plummeted. Over the previous two decades the growth of US exports had tended to depend, paradoxically, on the increase of US imports. This is because they relied

upon a world economy whose increasingly export-dependent growth had itself become ever more reliant upon the growth of US imports. The stock market's last upward thrust in the final couple of years of the century had rescued the world economy, as well as US exports, from the East Asian crisis by setting off a short-lived import boom, especially in information technology components. But with US equity prices and investment collapsing—especially, again, in 'new economy' sectors—the process was reversed. Japan, Europe and East Asia now lost steam as fast as the US, while much of the developing world, notably Latin America, was plunged, after a brief honeymoon, back into crisis. Because the economies of the US's trading partners had become so dependent on sales to the US—and because the US possesses a far greater propensity to import than does either the EU or Japan—the descent into recession reduced the capacity of the rest of the world to absorb US imports more than vice versa. In 2001, 2002 and the first half of 2003, US export growth therefore fell even further behind US import growth than previously. US real imports, after having increased by 13.2 per cent in 2000, dropped by 2.9 per cent in 2001, then grew by 3.7 per cent and 2.25 per cent respectively, in 2002 and the first half of 2003. US real exports, on the other hand, after growing by 9.7 per cent in 2000, fell by 5.4 per cent, 3.6 per cent and 0.1 per cent in 2001, 2002 and the first half of 2003. As the rest of the world, deprived of the American motor, slowed down, the US could look only to itself to launch an economic recovery upon which the whole global economy depended.

To stem the plunge, from January 2001 onwards the Federal Reserve lowered the cost of borrowing with unprecedented rapidity, reducing short-term interest rates on eleven occasions, from 6.5 per cent to 1.75 per cent, over the course of the year. But, as the Fed discovered, interest-rate reductions are much more effective in reviving an economy in which consumption has been restricted by a tightening of credit—as in all previous post-war cyclical downturns—than in re-starting an economy driven into recession by declining investment and employment resulting from over-capacity, making for falling rates of profit.

Vastly over-supplied with plant and equipment, non-financial corporations had little incentive to step up capital accumulation, no matter how far interest rates were brought down by the Fed. On the contrary, having increased their indebtedness from 73 to 90 per cent of their output between 1995 and 2000, they had every motivation to restore their

balance sheets by trying to save more, and their doing so made it that much more difficult for them to invest. Whereas vastly increased apparent wealth derived from market capitalization allowed non-financial corporations to raise their borrowing as a proportion of their income to a near record 8 per cent for 1998, 1999 and 2000 taken together, they were obliged sharply to reduce it to 4.6 per cent, 2.1 per cent and 2.6 per cent, in 2001, 2002 and the first half of 2003, as the value of their stock dramatically contracted. Real non-residential expenditures on plant and equipment thus fell like a stone, declining from an average annual rate of 10.1 per cent between 1995 and 2000 to an average annual rate of *minus* 4.4 per cent between 2000 and the middle of 2003. It has been the failure of investment to revive that has constituted the ultimate factor holding back the economy.

Industrial over-capacity

The manufacturing sector was the main, almost exclusive, site and source of the economic slowdown, as developments maturing over the previous half-decade came to fruition. Although by the middle 1990s this sector had come to constitute only 29.3 per cent and 32.7 per cent, respectively, of corporate and non-financial GDP, as late as 1995 manufacturing still accounted for 42.5 per cent of corporate and 50 per cent of non-financial corporate profits before payment of interest. As a consequence, manufacturing's descent into crisis meant crisis for the whole economy.

Between 1995 and 2000, the growth of costs in the US manufacturing economy posed no threat to profitability. On the contrary: productivity growth in manufacturing grew so rapidly that it more than cancelled out the rise of wages, with the result that unit labour costs fell at an impressive average annual rate of more than 1 per cent a year over the quinquennium. Even so, US producers found it vastly more difficult to defend, let alone expand, their markets and profit margins during this period, because they had to face an appreciation of the dollar in trade-weighted terms of 21 per cent and, from 1997, crisis conditions on the world market. World export prices, measured in dollars, fell at the stunning rate of 4 per cent per annum over the half decade, with the consequence that, while US manufacturing exports increased at an average annual rate of 7 per cent a year, manufacturing imports rose 40 per cent faster, at 10 per cent per annum, and their share of the US market jumped by a third. Despite falling production costs, price pressure was

therefore so intense that the manufacturing sector maintained its rates of profit only between 1995 and 1997, and then simply because wage pressure was so weak in those two years, real wages falling by 1.5 per cent. Between 1997 and 2000, prices fell even more than did unit labour costs, with the result that, in that short period, as the economy bubbled over, the manufacturing rate of profit fell by 15 per cent.

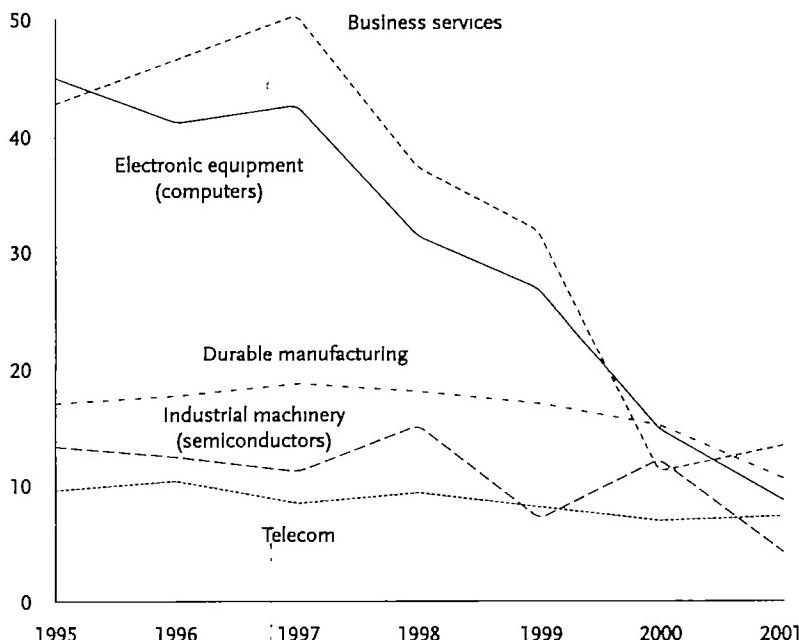
In 2001 the crisis in manufacturing reached a climax, as competitive pressures from the world market intensified and were vastly complicated by the slowdown of the domestic market. As world manufacturing prices dropped by a further 2.4 per cent and US manufacturing exports (nominal) fell by 7 per cent, American manufacturers saw growth in real domestic consumption cut by half. In the face of these contractions, US manufacturing GDP dropped by a staggering 6 per cent and capacity utilization declined by 7.1 per cent. Meanwhile, real manufacturing investment fell by 5.4 per cent. With output and capacity utilization, as well as expenditures on new plant, equipment and software, falling off so rapidly, there was no way employers could reduce the labour force fast enough to prevent a huge fall in productivity growth. Employment (measured in hours) was in fact cut back by 4.8 per cent. But the growth of output per hour in manufacturing still plunged from 6.1 per cent in 2000 to minus 0.4 per cent in 2001.

Manufacturing firms responded to these excruciating pressures by battenning down employees' compensation: real wages, which had grown by 3.9 per cent in 2000, fell by 1.2 per cent in 2001. But with productivity as well as capacity utilization diving, employers still could not prevent unit labour costs from rising by 2 per cent. Nor could they stop domestic manufacturing prices from falling by 0.4 per cent, after a 2 per cent drop in 2000. The outcome was that in 2001 the rate of profit for the manufacturing sector fell a further 21.3 per cent, to a level over a third down from its 1997 peak. Between 1997 and 2001, as corporate indebtedness rocketed, manufacturing net interest as a proportion of manufacturing net profits rose from 19 per cent to 40.5 per cent, a post-war record. Partly as a consequence, by 2001 manufacturing profits net of interest had fallen a total of 44.4 per cent from their high point in 1997.

The profitability crisis struck all across manufacturing, including traditional industries from textiles to steel to leather. But the eye of the storm was the information technology sector, which is located for the most part

in durable goods manufacturing, but includes a few industries outside manufacturing, most notably telecommunications. Business services, which cater largely to manufacturing corporations, were hard hit, too. The high-tech industries had been the main beneficiaries of the financial largesse generated by the stock market run-up, becoming the leading agents of over-investment—and, in turn, the main victims of over-capacity, falling profits and over-burdened balance sheets. Many experienced huge falls in their profit rates. Even where their profit rates did not fall spectacularly, these industries generally experienced very major declines in their absolute profits after payment of interest, due to the huge cost of servicing the enormous debts that they had run up during the bubble. Between 1995 and 2001, profits excluding interest in electronic equipment (including computers) fell from \$59.5 billion (1997) to \$12.2 billion, in industrial equipment (including semi-conductors) from \$13.3 billion to \$2.9 billion, in telecommunications from \$24.2 billion (1996) to \$6.8 billion, and in business services from \$76.2 billion (1997) to \$33.5 billion.

FIGURE 1: US manufacturing, high-tech and related profit rates (%), 1995–2001



Sources: GPO by Industry and Fixed Asset Tables, BEA website; Andrew Glyn, personal correspondence
See 'Note on Sources', p. 100 for more information.

The decline in manufacturing profitability was by itself responsible for the *entire* fall in the rate of profit for the non-financial corporate sector as a whole in 2001. That is, the non-financial corporate sector with manufacturing left out managed to avoid any fall in the rate of profit in 2001.⁷ As it was, the profitability crisis in manufacturing was severe enough in 2001 to inflict a 10 per cent fall in the rate of profit on the non-financial corporate sector as a whole. By 2001, the non-financial corporate profit rate, having already experienced a 19 per cent decline between 1997 and 2000, had fallen by a total of 27 per cent from its 1997 peak.

It is from the manufacturing sector, and related industries, that the most powerful downward pressures on the economy have continued to emanate, as manufacturing employers have cut back mercilessly in order to restore profits. In 2002 and the first half of 2003, they reduced output by 0.4 per cent and 2.8 per cent, respectively,⁸ and brought down investment quite a bit faster, at an average annual rate of 5 per cent or more.⁹ Above all, they radically reduced employment. Between July 2000 and October 2003, employers eliminated 2.8 million jobs in the manufacturing sector. This was well over 100 per cent of the total of 2.45 million private-sector jobs lost in the same period—meaning that the economy outside manufacturing actually gained jobs during these years. Since its most recent peak in 1997, the manufacturing sector has lost one-fifth of its labour force. Largely as a consequence, after having increased at an average annual rate of 3.8 per cent between 1995 and 2000, total compensation in manufacturing fell at the annual average rate of 3.1 per cent between the end of 2000 and the middle of 2003, thereby accounting, once again, for most of the decline in real total compensation that took place in the non-farm economy during that period. By way of its continual, powerful restraining effect on the growth of effective demand, the crisis of investment and employment has been the main depressive factor in the overall economy since the slowdown began in the latter part

⁷ Parts of the non-manufacturing, non-financial corporate sector also experienced intense profitability problems, including telecommunications, business services and the airline industry; but their losses were offset by gains of other industries.

⁸ These figures are for gross output, not value added (GDP). They are therefore first approximations. The standard value-added numbers will not be made available by the Bureau of Economic Analysis until later this year.

⁹ This assumes that the fall in manufacturing investment was at least as great in the private economy as a whole. Figures for manufacturing investment for 2002 and 2003 are not yet available.

of 2000—and the collapse of investment and employment in the manufacturing sector has been largely behind that crisis.

III. A DISTORTED PATH OF EXPANSION

Through the middle of 2003, Greenspan's historic interest rate reductions ran up against a wall of industrial over-capacity and corporate indebtedness, failing to stem the slowdown of investment, to stimulate corporate borrowing or to impart new dynamism to manufacturing and related industries, especially in the form of job growth. The Fed therefore had no choice but to fall back on driving up consumption growth to keep the economy turning over. In this it has to a significant degree succeeded, with the consequence that the economy has ended up following a paradoxical two-track trajectory. Manufacturing and related industries have continued a profound contraction whose origins go back to 1995, and lie in ongoing global over-capacity, intensifying overseas competition and a long overvalued dollar. But major parts of the non-manufacturing sector have, by contrast, succeeded in sustaining an expansion that also originated in the mid-1990s, due to the perpetuation throughout the boom and right through the ensuing slowdown of broader trends and conditions dating back to that point—notably the ever easier availability of cheap credit, the continued blowing up of asset-price bubbles, the impetuous and unending growth of debt, the credit-driven increase of consumer spending, and the dizzying rise of imports made cheap by the high dollar.

To some extent, Greenspan's reduced interest rates could directly foster borrowing, and thereby consumption. During economic slowdowns, households typically need to increase their borrowing in order to cover the loss of income that results from slowed wage growth and rising unemployment. But precisely because they face downward pressure on their incomes, households face inherent limits to their ability to increase the burden of debt they can take on. In 2001, due to layoffs and the holding down of wages, total real compensation of all employees, including those working for the government, fell by 1.7 per cent compared to the final quarter of 2000; it dropped another 0.1 per cent in 2002; and it rose by only 0.4 per cent in the first half of 2003. The intent of the Fed has been to overcome the limitations of such stagnant incomes

by reviving—or perhaps more precisely, continuing—its strategy of the 1990s, namely to stimulate the economy by relying on wealth effects.

Once more Greenspan has thus sought to push up asset prices, inflating paper wealth, in order to enhance the capacity to borrow and thereby to spend. But, in the wake of the deep fall of profitability from 1997 and of equity prices from the middle of 2000, as well as corporations' preoccupation with reducing indebtedness by cutting back on borrowing, he has had to shift emphasis. The Fed is still attempting to boost the stock market to improve the financial condition of corporations and the business outlook more generally. But it has had to place its hopes for stimulating the economy primarily on driving down mortgage rates and pushing up housing prices, so as to pave the way for increased household borrowing and consumer spending (including investment in houses). In their own terms, these hopes have been spectacularly realized.

Thanks in part to the Fed's actions, long-term interest rates fell significantly and housing prices rose precipitously. Between June 2000 and June 2003, the interest rate on 30-year fixed mortgages fell from 8.29 per cent to 5.23 per cent, a total of 37 per cent. In the same interval, housing prices rose by 7 per cent per annum, extending and accentuating a trend that originated between 1995 and 2000, when they increased at an average annual rate of 5.1 per cent. With their collateral sharply increased and their cost of borrowing radically reduced, households were able to ramp up their borrowing rapidly, even as the economy slowed down, hourly real wage growth declined and unemployment rose. Already between 1998 and 2000, household borrowing as a proportion of annual household income, averaging 7.5 per cent, was approaching the historic highs reached in the mid-1980s. Starting in 2001, it climbed steeply, and during the first half of 2003, smashed all records at close to 12 per cent. The growth of household debt accounted for 70 per cent of the total growth of private non-financial debt outstanding between 2000 and 2003. Almost all of the household borrowing in these years—85 per cent—was by way of home mortgages made possible by housing price inflation and reduced interest rates; less than 15 per cent through other forms of consumer credit, which were evidently held down by the stagnation of incomes.

By taking advantage of the appreciation in the value of their homes, and the fall in borrowing costs, households have been able to 'cash out'

huge sums from their home equity—by way of home sales, refinancing and second mortgages!—and so play to the hilt their assigned role of driving the economy by sustaining the growth of consumption. Between 2000 and the middle of 2003, the increase of real consumption expenditures reached 2.8 per cent per year, despite the fact that, as noted, total real compensation actually declined in the same period. The sustained growth of consumption, itself dependent upon the growth of household debt, was *the determining factor behind* increases in GDP from 2000 onwards—in limiting the precipitous descent of the economy in 2001, in stabilizing it in the winter of 2001–02, and in stimulating the growth that has taken place since. In national accounting terms, the increase of personal consumption expenditures was responsible for almost all of the GDP increase that took place between 2000 and the first half of 2003. By itself, it accounted for 16 per cent more growth than actually took place in that period. Put another way, it not only offset, by itself, the substantial negative impact on GDP growth of falling investment and a widening trade deficit, but accounted in addition for about 50 per cent of the positive growth that took place. Having fallen to 0.3 per cent in 2001, GDP growth reached 2.4 per cent in 2002 and 2.35 per cent in the first half of 2003 (annualized).

TABLE I: *Consumption-driven growth*

	2001	2002	2003.5	Total
GDP growth (%)	0.3	2.4	2.35	5.05
<i>Per cent GDP growth accounted for by:</i>				
Personal consumer spending	1.67	2.15	2.02	5.84
Private domestic investment	-1.90	0.15	-0.26	-2.01
Net exports of goods/services	-0.18	-0.67	-0.51	-1.36
Federal and local expenditures	0.65	0.81	0.83	2.29

Domestic investment includes residential and non-residential
Source NIPA Table S.2, BEA website

The Fed is betting the bank that the growth of consumption will hold up long enough for corporations to work off their excess capacity, begin

investing and hiring again, and allow the almighty consumer to take a rest. That's what is required to restore the economy to a semblance of health.

Fiscal stimulus

While the Fed implemented its monetary stimulus, the Bush Administration added what looks like a major fiscal stimulus modelled after that of Ronald Reagan, forcing through Congress enormous cuts in taxation and major increases in military spending. But these measures are less potent than they look. The administration has thrown a few small bones to the mass of the population—cash grants to the states to help cover the cost of medicare, a reduction in taxes on married people, an increase in the tax credit for childcare, and the moving forward in time of reductions in rates called for by the Tax Act of 2001. But all these measures taken together were worth only about \$35 billion in 2003. They can provide a palpable temporary boost. But their impact on the \$11 trillion economy is bound to be fleeting. The remaining tax reductions mainly decrease the levy on dividends and therefore benefit the very rich almost exclusively. Their effect will be much more to increase savings and the purchase of financial assets than to boost consumption, doing little to improve aggregate demand. The fact that tax cuts at the federal level will have the effect of reducing revenue to money-strapped state governments, forcing them to cut back on spending and in some cases to increase taxation, is likely to counteract much, though not all, of what stimulus they do impart.

In the wake of 9/11, military spending grew by 6 per cent in 2001 and 10 per cent in 2002, enabling the equities of the nation's nine largest defence contractors to outperform the average firm listed on the S&P 500 index by 30 per cent in the year following the attacks on the WTC and Pentagon.¹⁰ Amounting to about 65 per cent and 80 per cent respectively of the total increases in federal spending in these two years, defence spending has unquestionably helped to push the economy forward. Nevertheless, the growth of military expenditures was responsible for an increase in GDP of no more than 0.75 per cent *in total* during 2001 and 2002.¹¹

¹⁰ Tim Bennett et al, 'Global News, Valuations and Forecasts' and Heidi Wood, Miles Walton and Aayush Sonthalia, 'Defense Budget Apt to Remain on Track', *Morgan Stanley Equity Research Aerospace and Defense*, 12 November and 16 December 2002. I wish to thank Aayush Sonthalia for making these available to me.

¹¹ In the second quarter of 2003, ballooning expenditures on the Iraq War lifted the rate of (otherwise lagging) GDP growth significantly, but it seems doubtful whether these are sustainable.

Of course, as the economy decelerated, the combination of huge tax breaks for the rich and giant increases in military spending sent the federal government once more deeply into the red. By 2000, thanks to the speculative boom and huge capital gains from the appreciation of stocks, the federal budget had gone positive to the tune of \$236 billion. In just two and a half years, however, it had fallen into negative territory by a whopping \$450 billion. Since the economy was sputtering, Keynesian deficits were very much in order. But as so much of the motivation of the Administration's package was political and military, rather than strictly economic, it is not surprising that the way in which it has plunged public finances from surplus to deficit has been minimally efficient as a stimulus to economic growth.

Due to the sustained increase in consumption, driven by fast-rising household and, to some extent, government debt, a good part of the economy outside manufacturing has come through the slowdown in relatively good shape. Even in the recession year 2001, the rate of profit for the entire non-financial corporate economy outside of manufacturing actually rose slightly, and it has risen a lot faster in 2002 and the first half of 2003. On the assumption that manufacturing output has remained roughly flat in this interval, GDP in the non-farm non-manufacturing sector has risen at an annual average rate of better than 3 per cent. The jobs picture was a lot darker. Although non-manufacturing employment increased in net terms by 230,000 between July 2000 and October 2003, the gains were all in finance (306,000), real estate (51,000), and health and educational services (1,515,000). Leaving aside these three industries, other parts of the sector lost 1,642,000 jobs. But the fact remains that those sectors best positioned to take advantage of falling interest rates, accelerated indebtedness, rising consumer spending, runaway import growth and rising asset prices—notably, construction, retail trade and, above all, finance—have done extremely well, imparting a distinctive cast to the economic trajectory of the US in the new millennium.

Construction and retail

The construction industry has enjoyed its greatest boom in the post-war epoch, and for obvious reasons. The economy has grown virtually non-stop for a dozen years, placing unprecedented strain on the supply of housing. Since the mid-1990s, moreover, the growth of consumption, buoyed by ever easier access to borrowing, has increased even faster, magnifying the impact on the demand for housing of the sustained

economic expansion. The inevitable consequence has been a spectacular increase of house sales and housing prices. Meanwhile, the growth of real wages in construction—where what had once been a highly organized industry is now largely de-unionized—has been held below 1 per cent per annum for the past ten years. Over the previous 15 years, between 1978 and 1993, construction real wages fell at an average annual rate of 1.1 per cent—a total of 14 per cent. The rate of profit in the construction industry has thus soared as never before, increasing by a factor of six in the decade ending in 2001, and reaching a level in that year 50 per cent higher than at any previous time since 1945, including the long post-war boom.

The prosperity of the retail trade, like that of the construction industry, was built on well over a decade of wage cutting. Between 1978 and 1991, real compensation in this sector fell at an average annual rate of 1.6 per cent, or 19 per cent in total. Over the next decade, retailers benefited not just from the general expansion of the economy, but from the particularly rapid increase of consumer expenditures—yuppie spending sprees fuelled by the wealth effect. They were further favoured by the unstoppable rise of the dollar which cheapened imports, paving the way for a rising tide of inexpensive goods of every description from China. Between 1995 and 2002, the PRC became the leading exporter to the US, as Chinese imports rose from \$44 billion to \$122.5 billion, bounding forward at an average annual pace of 16 per cent. In this process, Wal-Mart—now the world's largest corporation—has played a much-publicized starring role, accounting today for no less than 10 per cent of all imports from China, and taking advantage of the over-production that is rife in so many Chinese industries to demand ever lower prices. But many other American retailers also did extremely well out of this commerce.¹² Between 1992 and 2001, retail trade employment increased by 2.4 million or 19 per cent. Over the same interval, the profit rate in retail trade increased every year, by a total of 57 per cent, including an 8 per cent increase in the recession year 2001.¹³

¹² Paul Wonnacott, 'Behind China's Export Boom, Heated Battle Among Factories', *Wall Street Journal*, 13 November 2003.

¹³ Space precludes consideration of the (much smaller) hotel and accommodation industry, which followed a roughly similar trajectory to that of retail trade, its employment increasing by more than 20 per cent and its rate of profit rising by 50 per cent between 1992 and 2001. Another consumption-driven case of a different sort, requiring much further study, is the vast health services industry, which registered huge jumps in corporate profits—from \$4.9 billion in 1989 to \$15.4 billion in 1994 to \$17.3 billion in 1999 to \$24.8 billion in 2001; not to mention a near 50 per cent expansion in employment.

Finance

The expansion of the financial sector ran parallel to that of construction and retail, but was of a different order entirely. Over the course of the 1990s, it assumed truly revolutionary proportions, transforming the map of the American economy and stretching uninterruptedly into the opening years of the new millennium. The turn to finance began in earnest with the shift to monetarism, high interest rates, a strong dollar and financial deregulation at the start of the 1980s. It resulted, in particular, from the failure of a decade-long attempt to quell the decline of non-financial profitability, especially in manufacturing, by means of Keynesian deficits and a low dollar. But despite ongoing steps to unshackle the financial sector and very major run-ups in both the bond market and the stock market during the 1980s, the combination of a debt-driven mergers-and-acquisitions craze, commercial real-estate bubble and equity inflation had, by the end of the decade, issued in major crises not only for commercial banks and developers, and the savings and loans, but even the non-financial corporations themselves.

All this changed in the 1990s, once Greenspan had bailed out the financial sector. With the onset of the recession of 1990–91, Greenspan not only brought short-term interest rates down dramatically, enabling banks to pursue with ever-improving results their standard policy of borrowing cheap short-term and lending dear long-term. In addition, he allowed banks, in violation of government regulations, to hold onto enormous quantities of long-term bonds—which appreciated spectacularly as long-term interest rates declined—without setting aside funds to cover associated risk.¹⁴ Financial sector profits were restored almost instantaneously, and they began a vertiginous ascent that has yet to be interrupted.

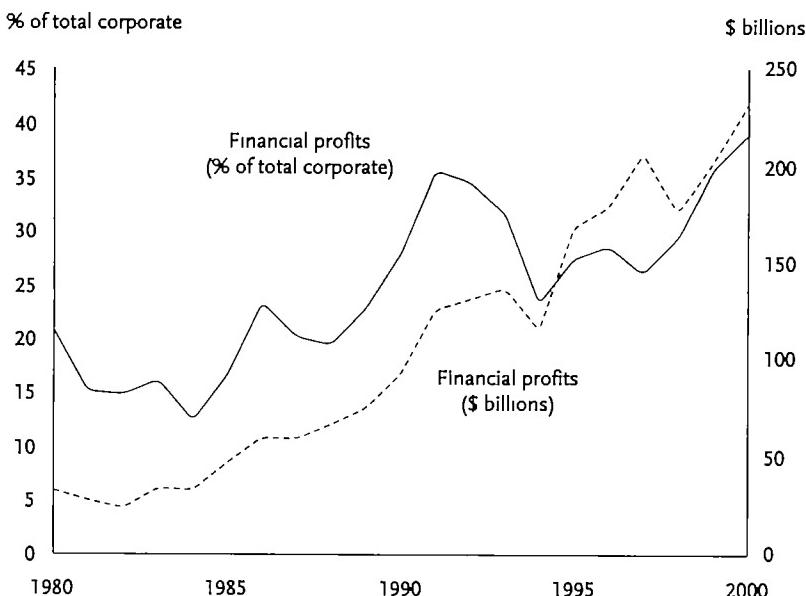
Every major trend of the 1990s, economic and political, ran in favour of finance. The real economy enjoyed continuous growth. Clinton's turn to budget balancing plus the impetuous rise of the dollar in the wake of the reverse Plaza Accord—both engineered by his economic czar Robert Rubin, formerly CEO at Goldman Sachs—reduced inflation to a minimum, defending real returns from lending (just as they hurt returns in manufacturing). Clinton and Rubin pushed banking deregulation to its logical conclusion, opening the way for the rise of 'one-stop financial supermarkets' that could make hitherto separated commercial

¹⁴ Joseph Stiglitz, *The Roaring Nineties*, London 2003, p. 43.

banking, investment banking and insurance functions work together to magnify profits. Above all, the stock-market bubble offered historically unmatched opportunities to rake in fees and profits for superintending share issues and mergers and acquisitions, while simultaneously managing the finance of corporate and consumer borrowing. Finally, as the decade, and the equity-price bubble, neared a climax, the nascent run-up in housing offered the financial sector still another huge field with multiple opportunities for killings. Between 1994 and 2000, profits for the financial sector doubled. Since, in the same period, profits in the non-financial corporate sector increased by only 30 per cent, financial-sector profits as a proportion of total corporate profits climbed from 23 to 39 per cent. In so doing, they accounted for *75 per cent of the increase* in corporate profits achieved in these years.

Nor did the bursting of the equity-price bubble, and slowdown in the real economy from 2000 onwards, do much to hold back the ascent of finance. The housing bubble replaced the stock-market bubble, and falling costs of borrowing did the rest. Profits stemming heavily from mortgage-related

FIGURE 2: Financial-sector profits as a proportion of total corporate profits



Percentage figure is financial profits divided by total corporate profits, minus net interest

Sources: NIPA Table 1.16 and GPO by Industry, BEA website

business, as well as bond trading and underwriting—all tied to declining interest rates—enabled banks and securities firms to continue to rack up sensational gains, even despite the huge fall in share prices and big reductions in the growth of corporate borrowing. Between 2000 and the first half of 2003, the period of the slowdown, financial-sector profits continued to expand dramatically, in both absolute and relative terms. In so doing, according to Morgan Stanley, they came to compose close to 50 per cent of total corporate profits, and to account for almost 80 per cent of the increase in corporate profits that occurred between 2000 and 2003.¹⁵

IV. CONTRADICTIONS OF A BUBBLE-DRIVEN ECONOMY

The Fed's turn to ever-easier credit brought a semblance of order to the non-manufacturing economy, further rises in profitability for the construction industry and retail trade, and the continuation of an epoch-making expansion of the financial sector. But it did so, in large part, by means of—and at the cost of—inflating the value of financial assets across the board, far beyond the worth of the underlying assets that they represent. The ensuing bubbles have provided the collateral required to support ever-greater borrowing so as to keep consumption rising and the economy turning over. The outcome has been that us economic growth in the past three years has been driven by increases in demand generated by borrowing against the speculative appreciation of on-paper wealth, far more than in demand generated by increased investment and employment, driven by rising profits.

Equity prices, of course, fell sharply from mid-2000. But, paradoxically, their decline failed even to begin to bring stock values into line with underlying profits, because the latter had fallen just as far. By October 2002, when equity prices bottomed out, the s&p 500 composite index was 42 per cent below its peak of July 2000; but the earnings–price ratio (i.e. the rate of return on investment in equities), which had already dropped by 48 per cent between its early 1995 peak and mid-2000, failed to rise at all, remaining stuck at around 3.7 : 1—meaning that equity

¹⁵ Steve Galbraith, 'Trying to Draw a Pound of Flesh Without a Drop of Blood', *Morgan Stanley us and the Americas Investment Research*, 8 September 2003, Steve Galbraith, 'Fading Fog', *Morgan Stanley us and the Americas Investment Research*, 21 September 2003. The Morgan Stanley data is for s&p 500 corporations. Adequate government data is not yet available on profits for the financial sector after 2001.

investments yielded an average annual return of under 4 per cent. In the absence of the Fed's cheap-credit policy, share prices would obviously have fallen a great deal further with respect to underlying earnings. But by implication, the equity price bubble was never allowed to burst.

A few months later, that bubble began a new expansion. From March 2003, bond prices rose and interest rates fell, apparently as an expression of the economy's underlying weakness. But equity prices took off on a new, uninterrupted ascent, and the S&P 500 rose by about 30 per cent in the following eight months. This was no doubt as the Fed had hoped. Nevertheless, by the summer of 2003, according to the *Financial Times*, the earnings–price ratio of the S&P 500 had fallen another 10 per cent or so to 3 : 1, compared to an historical average of about 7 : 1. The Fed was succeeding in keeping the business climate from darkening further; but in doing so, it was actually sustaining the stock-market bubble, in the face of the equity price crash and ensuing economic slowdown. A significant correction could send the economy directly back into recession.

Housing bubble

As equity prices, from the mid-90s onwards, started to outrun underlying corporate profits and GDP, housing prices began to bubble up too. From 1975, when data first becomes available, through 1995, housing prices increased at an approximately similar rate to consumer prices, so remaining roughly steady in real terms. During the first half of the 1980s, the housing price index fell about 5–10 per cent behind the CPI, before catching up to it again by 1985; then, between 1985 and 1990, it rose about 13 per cent above the CPI, before falling back again to its level in 1995. Real housing prices in 1995 were thus the same as they had been in 1985 and 1979. But between 1995 and the first half of 2003, the rise in the home price index exceeded the increase in the CPI by more than 35 points—historically, an unheard-of rise in real housing costs.

The explanation for this housing bubble seems fairly straightforward, given its timing. As shareholders accumulated wealth via the stock-market boom, they were able to demand more expensive houses faster than the latter could be supplied. Then, as house prices rose, purchasers became willing to pay ever-increasing sums for real estate, on the assumption that values would continue upwards—as in the stock market. When the stock market crashed and the boom came to an end in 2000,

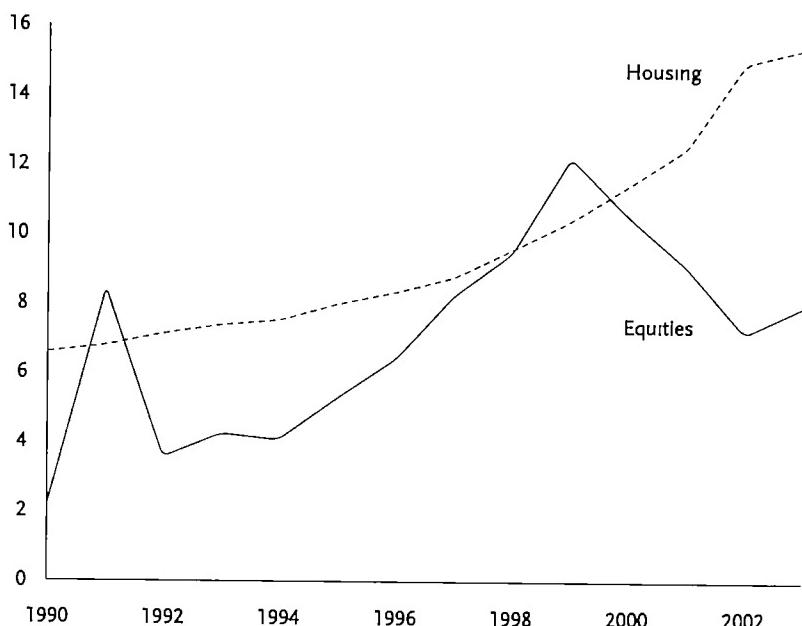
the real-estate bubble was sustained in part by the Fed's interest-rate reductions, but also by the transfer of funds from the equity to the housing market, especially against a background of sharply reduced returns from lending at interest. The rise in house prices was self-sustaining, as it allowed homeowners, as interest rates dropped, to buy ever more costly homes, keeping demand running ahead of supply.¹⁶

Thus in just four years, between 1995 and 1999, household wealth in the form of housing increased by 25 per cent. But between the time of the equity market's peak of 1999 and its trough of the first quarter of 2003, housing values rose even faster—prices increasing at an average annual rate about 5 per cent higher than that of consumer prices. In fact, real home prices rose more during those three years than in any other comparable period on record. As a consequence, while shares (including mutual funds) owned by households plunged in value from \$12.2 trillion to \$7.15 trillion in this brief interval, a drop of \$5.05 trillion or 44 per cent, residential real estate owned by households rose in value from \$10.4 trillion to \$13.9 trillion, an increase of \$3.6 trillion or 35 per cent, and regained its former place as households' number one source of wealth.

In the wake of this huge paper appreciation of the value of their homes, households were able to extract dramatically increased funds by selling their homes at prices surpassing their mortgage debt, by refinancing their mortgages, and by taking out home equity loans—with enormous consequences for the growth of consumption and, in turn, GDP. Between 1990 and 1997, households' extraction of equity averaged about \$150 billion per year; but as the housing bubble began to swell in the last three years of the decade, this figure doubled to around \$300 billion annually in 1998, 1999 and 2000. In 2001, 2002 and the first half of 2003, home sales set new all-time records at \$6.2 trillion, \$6.6 trillion and \$7 trillion (annualized). So did mortgage re-financing, at \$1.2 trillion, \$1.6 trillion and \$3 trillion, respectively. Against this background, in the same three years, the cash raised by way of mortgage borrowing reached unheard of levels—\$420 billion, \$600 billion and \$716 billion, respectively.¹⁷

¹⁶ This and the preceding paragraph depend on Dean Baker and Simone Baribeau, 'Homeownership in a Bubble: The Fast Path to Poverty?', 13 August 2003, available at Center for Economic Policy Research website. See especially Figure 1 on 'The Real Cost of Owning and Renting'.

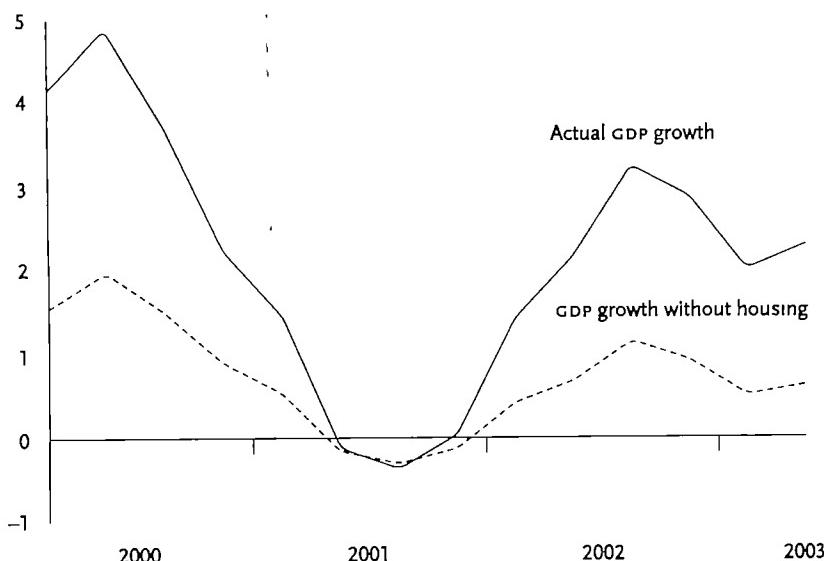
¹⁷ Time series on mortgage re-financing and on cash-outs were constructed by Mark Zandi, chief economist at Economy.com, whom I wish to thank for his generosity in making this data available to me.

FIGURE 3: *Household wealth—equities vs real estate, \$ trillions*

Source Flow of Funds Table B100, FRS website.

In 2001, 2002 and the first half of 2003, mortgage equity withdrawals amounted, respectively, to an astounding 5 per cent, 7.7 per cent, and 9 per cent of US personal disposable income—playing an enormous role in sustaining consumer spending, in the wake of a radical decline of consumption growth. According to the Fed, households have used roughly 50 per cent of their cash-outs to finance increased consumer expenditures, on everything from home improvement to vehicle purchases, vacations, education, medical expenses—and, in the case of some hard-pressed families, even general living expenses. Close to one-third of the cash, meanwhile, is used to repay higher-cost credit card and other instalment debt, freeing up income for more consumption. The remaining cash is used to finance other investments, usually real-estate assets, tending to drive up housing demand, prices and so, in turn, gains in household net worth.¹⁸

¹⁸ Mark Zandi, 'Housing's Virtuous Cycle', *Regional Financial Review*, August 2003, p 13.

FIGURE 4: *Quarterly contribution of housing to GDP growth (%), 2000–03*

Percentage change from the same quarter in the previous year. Source Economy.com

Since the end of 2000, money raised through mortgage refinancing alone has been responsible for at least 20 per cent of the total growth of GDP. If one also takes into account cash-outs through home sales and second mortgages, as well as residential investment spending and purchases of home furnishings, housing and mortgage markets have accounted, in total, for no less than two-thirds of GDP growth between 2000 and the first half of 2003. This means that, in the absence of these contributions from housing, average annual GDP growth in this period would have been just 0.6 per cent, instead of the 1.7 per cent that actually took place.¹⁹

Yet it is hard to see how cashing out on this scale can fail to decline significantly in the not-too-distant future. This is because price inflation

¹⁹ These results are based on simulations using Economy.com's macroeconomic model. See Zandi, 'Housing's Virtuous Cycle', p. 14 and fn. 3, especially Chart 3; also Homeownership Alliance, 'The Economic Contribution of the Mortgage Refinancing Boom', December 2002, pp. 1–5; and Homeownership Alliance, 'Mortgage Refinancing Accounts for 20 Percent of Real Economic Growth Since 2001', press release, 17 December 2002 (both available at www.homeownershipalliance.com).

in real estate seems bound to lose speed, while interest rates—now near post-war lows—are more likely to rise than fall, leaving less scope for withdrawals. So, too, is homeowners' propensity to borrow likely to decline, as the equity held by households in their homes had, by the middle of 2003, already been reduced to a record post-war low of 54 per cent of their homes' value, down from 60 per cent a decade ago; while their debt as a percentage of household income has climbed to a record 110 per cent, up from 90 per cent as recently as 1995.²⁰ But if household borrowing slows, the growth of consumer expenditures, hitherto the key to the economy's health, is bound to be hard hit. As Greenspan mildly put it: 'The frenetic pace of home equity extraction last year [2002] is likely to appreciably simmer down in 2003, possibly notably lessening support to purchases of goods and services.'²¹

Dollar bubble and current-account deficit

By pumping up consumer spending, especially by means of the debt-driven housing bubble, the Fed's easy-credit regime enabled Americans to keep raising their imports between 2000 and the middle of 2003, even as US exports declined in the face of the drop-off of purchasing power in most of the rest of the world. The consequence has been to prolong and deepen a pattern of international economic development that dates back to the first half of the 1980s, in which a steep rise in US manufacturing imports and the trade deficit widens the American current-account deficit, expands US overseas liabilities, and fuels export-led growth throughout much of the rest of the world, above all East Asia.

This pattern was inaugurated in 1979–80 with the international turn away from Keynesian expansion to monetarist contraction as a means to combat the reduced profitability that continued to grip the advanced capitalist economies, especially in manufacturing. The ensuing jump in interest rates, reduction in the growth of social spending and repression of wage growth did encourage the shake-out of redundant, high-cost and low-profit means of production and, in that way, tended to contribute to the recovery of profitability system-wide. But these same forces also brought about a sharp decrease in the growth of government and consumer spending, which, in combination with reduced investment

²⁰ James Cooper and Kathleen Madigan, 'The Skittish Bond Market Won't Shake Housing—For Now', *Business Week*, 14 July 2003.

²¹ 'The Home Mortgage Market': speech by Alan Greenspan, 4 March 2003, FRB website.

growth, cut aggregate demand, inhibiting any uptick of profitability and exacerbating the slowdown. In the face of stagnant domestic markets, and further checks to deficit spending resulting from financial deregulation, growth in most of the advanced capitalist world came to depend increasingly on stepping up manufacturing exports. But the ever greater generalization of export-dependent growth across the globe only exacerbated the underlying tendency to over-capacity in international manufacturing which, if left to itself, would—sooner rather than later—have led to the seizing up of the world economy.

Against this background of system-wide stagnation, the impetuous growth of us debt, in combination with a soaring dollar, became the central motor driving the world economy. Simply put, since the early 1980s the system has moved forward by way of the expansion of the us current account deficit, leading to the piling up of ever greater us liabilities to the rest of the world on the one hand, and the increase of over-capacity in the international manufacturing sector on the other. As late as 1979–80, the us ran manufacturing trade surpluses and, leaving aside fuel imports, overall trade surpluses as well. But from 1981 onwards, us interest rates skyrocketed, the dollar took off and us deficits, both federal and private, broke new records every year. As a result, the us manufacturing sector sustained the worst crisis in its post-war history. By 1987, with exports stagnating and imports rising steeply, the manufacturing trade balance had gone a record \$120 billion into the red and the current-account deficit had reached an unprecedented 3.4 per cent of GDP. As the opposite side of the same coin, rising us manufacturing imports played a central role in pulling the world economy from the deep recession of the early 1980s and underpinning a new cyclical upturn.

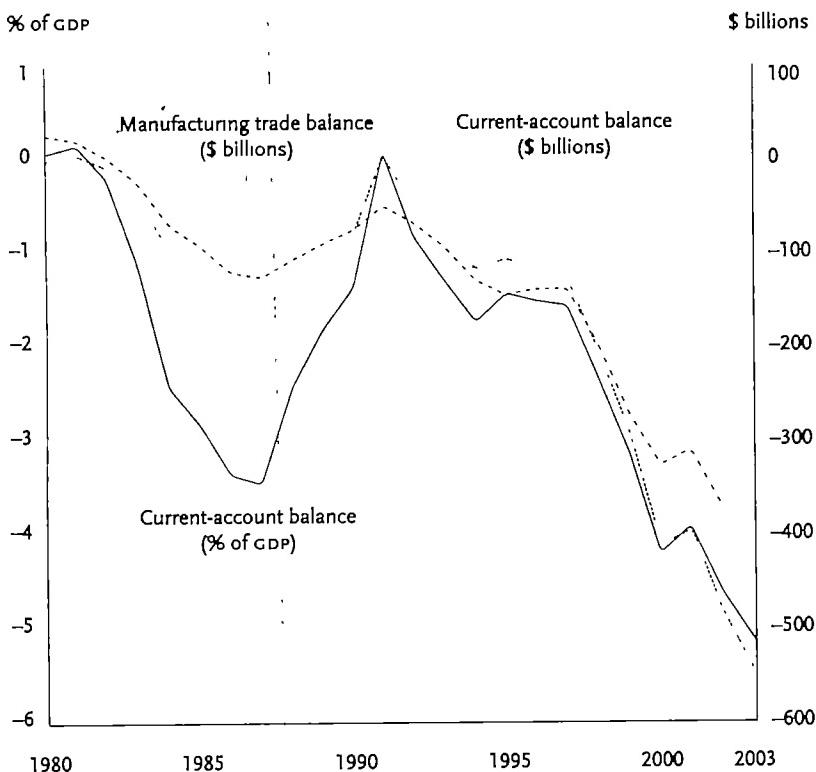
The indispensability of us borrowing and currency appreciation for the economic dynamism of the global economy was demonstrated to the hilt from the second half of the 1980s onwards. As the dollar fell sharply from 1985, as private borrowing temporarily collapsed with the recession of 1990–91, and as us public deficits began to dry up from 1993, the us manufacturing trade deficit fell as low as \$57 billion (on average) in 1992–93 and the current-account deficit was temporarily eliminated. The consequence was that, during the first half of the 1990s, the advanced capitalist economies experienced their worst performance of the entire post-war epoch (outside of the us and the East Asian NICs whose currencies were tied to the declining dollar).

Between the mid-1990s and the end of the century came yet another reversal. The astounding run-up of corporate and household borrowing, consequent upon the stock-market bubble, in combination with a new takeoff of the dollar, now assumed the role previously played by public deficits in providing the subsidy to demand required to drive not just the US but the world economy as a whole, by inciting a veritable tidal wave of US manufacturing imports. These grew from \$480 billion in 1993 to \$1 trillion in 2000, more than doubling in seven years, while increasing as a share of manufacturing output by 50 per cent. Already by 1995, the manufacturing trade deficit had jumped to \$145 billion. It reached \$271 billion by 1999, and increased to \$369 billion by 2002. In this way, it accounted, by itself, for something like 60 per cent of the titanic increase in the US current-account deficit between 1995 and 2002, and three-quarters of its absolute magnitude in 2002.

In the second half of the 1990s, the US current account itself quadrupled in size and tripled as a percentage of GDP, setting new records almost every year. Between 2000 and the middle of 2003, it then rose by another 20 per cent to an unprecedented \$544 billion, five times its 1995 level. In so doing, it both profoundly exacerbated the difficulties of the US manufacturing sector and provided an indispensable stimulus to the rest of the world economy—pulling Europe and Japan out of their doldrums after 1995; saving much of East Asia (and the rest of the world) from near collapse in 1997–98; rescuing Latin America from deep crises in 1994–95, and again in 1998–99; and, finally, keeping global depression at bay from 2001 to the present.

Of course, the rise of the US current-account deficit has itself depended on the willingness of the rest of the world to hold ever increasing US debts and assets, in effect financing the increase of American consumption to enable their own manufacturing exports and output to continue to grow. During the boom and bubble of the second half of the 1990s, overseas investors were more than happy to fund the US current-account deficit. In expectation of big corporate profits and the unending appreciation of assets, they made huge direct investments in the US and bought enormous quantities of corporate equities and bonds, helping to push up the currency ever higher—a dollar bubble that accompanied, and was largely the creation of, the asset-price bubble. Between 1995 and 2000, as the US current-account deficit exploded, the total of US gross assets held by the rest of the world increased from \$3.4 to \$6.4 trillion,

FIGURE 5: Current-account and manufacturing trade balance, 1980–2003



Sources. Table 3, *US Aggregate Foreign Trade Data*, ITA website,
US International Transactions, BEA website

or 75 per cent of US GDP.²² But as the American economy slowed and the US stock market declined from mid-2000, the rest of the world's private investors found US assets increasingly attractive. Purchases of corporate and Treasury bonds, as well as bonds sold by US agencies such as Fannie Mae and Freddy Mac, continued to grow smartly. But both equity purchases by the rest of the world and foreign direct investment fell sharply—the former dropping from an average of \$153 billion for 1999 and 2000, to \$65 billion for 2001 through the first half of 2003, the latter declining from \$306 billion to \$86 billion across the same period. Europeans, in particular, fled US assets. Having peaked in the

²² See *The Boom and the Bubble*, pp. 208–9 and Table 8.1.

year ending in October 2000 at \$115.6 billion, Eurozone purchases of US equities collapsed to just \$4.9 billion in the year ending in April 2003. The result has inevitably been downward pressures on the dollar, intensified by higher interest rates in Europe. Between early 2001 and the middle of 2003, the dollar fell by 37 per cent against the euro, 27 per cent alone in the year ending June 2003.²³

The dollar's decline against the euro will tend, all else being equal, to make it easier for the US to export and harder to import. But under current conditions it may fail to bring about much improvement in the US trade and current-account deficits, and risks undermining the European economies. Worsening recession in the EU would reduce European demand for US goods, offsetting much of the expected benefit for American exporters from the decline of the dollar. Between 2001 and the first half of 2003, the US trade deficit with Europe actually increased by more than one quarter, from \$34.3 to \$43.4 billion. Were the dollar to continue to fall in response to this widening gap, the Federal Reserve could be faced with an agonizing choice: either to let the currency drop and risk a wholesale liquidation of US properties by foreign investors—which could wreak havoc in asset markets and set off a serious run on the dollar—or raise interest rates and risk pushing the domestic economy back into recession.

East Asian policies

In fact, so far the overall trade-weighted decline in the dollar's exchange rate has been limited to around 11 per cent. For its fall has occurred almost entirely against the euro and only to a small extent against the currencies of East Asia. This is despite the fact that East Asia has accounted for a disproportionate share of US trade and current-account deficits, which have risen above \$100 billion per year with both Japan and China. The reason why the dollar has held up against East Asian currencies is that, led by Japan and China (and including Hong Kong and South Korea), East Asian governments have stepped up a long-standing policy of recycling their current-account surpluses into dollar-denominated assets to keep down their own currencies. Today, East Asia holds \$1.6 trillion in dollar reserves, 70 per cent of the world's total, up from just 30 per cent in 1990. As the US entered its slowdown, and the American current-account deficit widened even further, China,

²³ Gertrude Chavez, 'Weak capital influx seen choking dollar rally', *Reuters Online*, 14 July 2003. Thanks to Doug Henwood and LBO list for this reference.

Japan, South Korea and Hong Kong entered the currency markets as never before, raising their combined ownership of US Treasuries from \$512 billion to \$696 billion in the brief period from December 2001 to June 2003. Indeed, over the first ten months of 2003, Japan and China alone covered an estimated 55 per cent of the US current-account deficit, buying \$150 billion and \$100 billion worth of dollars, respectively.²⁴

The East Asian governments have not, of course, pursued this course for altruistic reasons, but in order to sustain the rapid growth of their countries' manufacturing exports to the US. Nevertheless, by closing the rising finance gap that would otherwise have resulted from the widening disparity between US exports and imports, East Asian governments have accomplished nothing less than the stabilization of the US economy. In the absence of their purchases, the hyper-expansionary policies pursued by the Fed and the Bush Administration would, almost certainly, have issued in a major fall in the dollar, leading to declining asset prices and rising borrowing costs and plunging the US, Asia, and the rest of the world back into recession. Still, it is hard to see how this symbiosis can be very long sustained.

For even if East Asian governments were able and willing to continue to buy dollar-denominated assets to keep their own currencies cheap—and thus subsidize their manufacturers' exports—this process cannot have a very long life. For the upshot would then be to hold down US exports and increase US imports, forcing up the American current-account deficit yet further and impelling still greater East Asian investments in US financial assets, with ominous implications for both the US and global economies. On the one hand, the influx of East Asian funds onto US financial markets, by pushing down the cost of borrowing, would tend, directly or indirectly, to fuel ongoing asset-price bubbles in equities and real estate. On the other hand, the growth of East Asian exports—puffed up by both the high dollar and government-subsidized US demand—would further undermine US industry, while exacerbating over-capacity in manufacturing on a global scale. This is, of course, much the same syndrome—of rising asset prices and manufacturing over-production—that has dogged the world economy and its US component throughout

²⁴ David Hale, 'The Manchurian Candidate', *Financial Times*, 29 August 2003; Christopher Swann, 'Weak renminbi is both boon and bane for the US', *Financial Times*, 26–27 July 2003; Jennifer Hughes, 'Asia's currency manipulation comes under scrutiny', *Financial Times*, 24 November 2003

the bubble-wrapped boom and the slowdown that has followed. It is a self-undermining path, in which the inexorable rise of us obligations to the rest of the world enables other economies to grow through exports which come at the expense of us productive power—and therefore of the capacity of the us to honour those obligations; a process that has already led to a stock-market crash and a recession.

V. A BASIS FOR BOOM?

Between the middle of 2000 and the middle of 2003, in order to keep the economy turning over while it worked off excess capacity and began once again to invest and create jobs, the economic authorities unleashed the greatest macroeconomic stimulus in us history. The Fed decreased its short-term rate from 6.5 per cent to a post-1958 low of 1 per cent (including reductions in November 2002 and June 2003). At the same time, the government's fiscal position moved from a surplus of 1.4 per cent of GDP to a projected deficit of 4.5 per cent, or \$450 billion. During the same interval, the trade-weighted value of the dollar fell more than 10 per cent. Nevertheless, despite this gargantuan boost, the economy barely budged. During the first half of 2003, real annualized expenditures on plant, equipment and software still failed to grow. In the same period, annualized growth of GDP, at 2.35 per cent, fell a drop lower than in 2002. It would indeed have been a third lower, just 1.5 per cent, had it not been for the huge and unsustainable leap in military spending on Iraq, which accounted for more than half of the economy's 3.3 per cent growth in the second quarter. Meanwhile, unemployment rose to 6.2 per cent—over 8 per cent including discouraged job-seekers—and jobs were continuing to disappear at an alarming rate. In July 2003, the non-farm economy lost 57,000 jobs—after losing 83,000 and 76,000, respectively, in June and May—and non-farm employment fell 358,000 below its level of July 2002. The disparity between stimulus and response appeared to be a direct expression of the economy's underlying weakness—its still unresolved problems of over-capacity and corporate financial fragility.

By autumn 2003, however, the economy certainly was accelerating. GDP leapt forward at an 8.2 per cent annualized pace, the largest quarterly gain since 1984. Equally significant, job growth suddenly went positive to the tune of more than 100,000 per month in September and October. To round out the picture, non-residential investment sprang up at a 14

per cent pace, the highest since the beginning of 2000. The economy seemed suddenly to have taken off.

Current acceleration

It may turn out, in retrospect, that the third quarter of 2003 did mark the start of a sustained cyclical upturn. Yet despite the spectacular headline numbers, it is not clear that us economic advance in the third quarter broke in a decisive way from its dependence on bubbles, debt and consumption. Once again, personal consumer spending, which expanded at a spectacular 6.4 per cent—including a whopping 26.9 per cent increase on durable goods—was at the heart of the expansion. Along with the growth of residential investment, it accounted for 75 per cent of total GDP increase. What drove personal consumption? Certainly not hourly real compensation (excluding of self-employed), which actually fell in the quarter by 0.2 per cent for the whole economy, with the result that annualized total real compensation for the first three quarters of 2003 actually fell slightly compared to 2002. What put money in consumers' pockets was, above all, households' enormous cash-outs from mortgage financing. During the first half of 2003, these climbed to about 7 per cent of GDP, and must have played a central role in the spending spree of the third quarter. The Bush Administration's tax rebates of 2003 were also unquestionably pivotal, putting about \$25 billion into people's pockets in the third quarter—a massive \$100 billion on an annualized basis. While pre-tax personal income grew by 1 per cent during this quarter, after tax personal income grew by a stunning 7.2 per cent.²⁵

What of investment, ultimately the decisive variable? A 14 per cent rise is in itself impressive and, taken in connection with the previous quarter's 7 per cent increase, could bode well for the future. Still, a good part of this increase was almost certainly driven by the 2003 tax law, which allows firms to accelerate depreciation, but only if they do so by the end

²⁵ 'Virtually all of the new consumption during the [third] quarter was financed by tax refunds, mortgage refinancing or borrowing'. Peter Gosselin, 'us Economy Expands at its Fastest Pace Since 1984', *Los Angeles Times*, 31 October 2003. That personal consumer expenditures fell in September appears to indicate that households had already largely spent their rebates. In mid-November Wal-Mart was sounding a warning over the strength of the recovery in us consumer spending, saying its shoppers remained cautious, favoured cheaper goods, and had little cash to spare: Neil Buckley, 'Wal-Mart Warns of Cautious Shoppers', *Financial Times*, 14 November 2003.

of 2004. In any case, annualized non-residential fixed capital investment in the third quarter was only 4.1 per cent higher than in 2002 and still 1.8 per cent and 6.9 per cent lower than in 2001 and 2000, respectively. This is not yet evidence of a boom in capital accumulation. The sizeable third-quarter increases in employment, coming after three years of steady decline, were unquestionably the most promising sign for the economy, and perhaps point to a turn-around. But they were still insufficiently large to offset the numbers entering the job market, and thereby reduce unemployment; or to effect any significant increase in real total compensation and so to lift demand. Clearly, there remains a long way to go to transcend the worst cyclical recovery of employment in the post-war era. In the 23 months following the official end of the recession in November 2001, private-sector employment fell by a further 919,000, with almost every sector suffering major losses. Had it not been for a gain of 753,000 jobs in education and health services, job losses in this period of ostensible recovery would have been well over 1.5 million. At the analogous point in the 'jobless recovery' following the March trough of the 1990–91 recession, i.e. January–February 1993, the economy was creating 277,000 jobs per month, more than double the 125,000 per month of September–October 2003.

A sustainable rise in profitability?

The necessary, if not sufficient, condition for significantly increased, and sustained, expenditures on both plant and equipment and new hiring is, of course, a dramatic and durable increase in profitability—the critical missing factor in the 1990s boom. In fact profitability, so far, has increased quite substantially from its low point—much faster than in the wake of the recession of 1990–91. The rate of profit for non-financial corporations for the first three quarters of 2003 reached a level 21 per cent above that of 2001, falling only about 10 per cent short of the 1997 peak. In so doing, it just about reached the average level of profitability for the whole of the business cycle of the 1990s. This is a significant development. It will be recalled, however, that the average rate of profit for the cycle of the 1990s did not rise palpably above the levels of those of the 1970s and 1980s, remaining about 20 per cent below the levels of the post-war boom, and proved insufficient to underpin a decisive break from the long downturn. For the economy to sustain a new boom by way of lasting increases in investment and employment, the impressive ascent of profitability that began in the mid 1980s but which came to

grief after the mid-1990s must, in effect, take up where it left off and go a lot higher.²⁶ The two-fold question that therefore imposes itself is whether the current, so far dynamic, profit-rate recovery can both continue *and* provide the basis for sustained increases in investment and employment—given that, up to this point, it has relied for the most part on stepping up the exploitation of the US labour force, the most vulnerable in the advanced capitalist world.

With output growth muted till recently, the increase in profitability has been primarily due to a widening of the gap between what workers produce per hour and what they are paid per hour. The measured growth of output per hour has been very impressive—5.4 per cent for 2002, 4.35 per cent for the first half of 2003 and 5 per cent for the first three quarters of 2003 for the non-financial corporate economy, after 2.0 per cent in 2001—while hourly real wages in the same intervals grew by only 1.9 per cent and 0.9 per cent respectively, after a 0.3 per cent gain in 2001. Some leading analysts are therefore already asserting that the miracle of productivity growth that never quite materialized in the 1990s—even though output per hour did palpably accelerate—is now upon us. By implication, all else being equal, a path to profitability revival has been opened up.

But such a deduction is premature, to say the least. Its Achilles' heel is obvious: so far, increases in output per hour have taken place in the face of a palpable *decline* in investment growth, i.e. the slower introduction of more and better plant, equipment and software. Between 1995 and 2000, the capital stock of the non-financial corporate sector grew at 3.9 per cent per annum, but was capable of bringing about technical advances sufficient to yield gains in annual output per hour of just 2.6 per cent. Is it really believable that, despite a more than 50 per cent reduction in the rate of growth of capital stock in 2001, 2002 and the first half of 2003—to 1.8 per cent—technological advance suddenly brought productivity gains that were almost twice as high? The obvious alternative, and more plausible, explanation is that registered productivity gains represent not so much increases in efficiency—i.e., more output from the same labour input—as more labour input per

²⁶ One major question mark over the measured increase in profits is the degree to which it takes into account firms' pension liabilities. By the end of 2002, according to Fed Governor Susan Schmidt Bies, 90 per cent of the defined-benefit plans of the S&P 500 companies were under-funded by a staggering \$200 billion: see James Cooper and Kathleen Madigan, 'A Jobs Recovery, Yes. A Hiring Boom, No', *Business Week*, 20 October 2002.

hour, i.e., speed-up and stretch-out. Such labour intensification yields not only higher profits but also—very significantly—higher profit rates, since the additional profits are extracted without the need to add capital stock. In fact, in 2002 and the first half of 2003, non-financial corporate capital stock (in nominal terms) barely rose, meaning that virtually all of the gains in profitability in this period were secured free of charge in terms of the plant and equipment laid down.

Jobs and investment

What seems to have happened is that, in order to cut costs, firms sharply reduced employment—by 2.1 per cent per year between 2000 and the first half of 2003 in the non-financial corporate economy—getting rid of their least productive labour inputs and thereby raising the average productivity of those they kept. In the wake of these job cuts, employers achieved the rest of the registered increases in output per hour by compelling the workers that remained to intensify their labour. It appears symptomatic that the very best sectoral productivity gains for 2002—at 6.4 per cent—were registered in the manufacturing sector, where output actually fell by 1.1 per cent and where the reduction of the workforce was most extreme: a decline in employment of 7 per cent, measured in hours. As *Business Week* bluntly concludes, ‘after several false starts, many corporate chieftains remain cautious, especially when it comes to hiring. So far, companies have been able to meet orders for their products by working employees harder’.²⁷

Nevertheless, it is a real question how much further corporations can go in enhancing their profits by extracting still more labour per hour, or day, from their employees. And once firms have to begin to pay for gains in productivity and thereby profits by adding to their capital stock (plant,

²⁷ ‘Business Turns on the Tap’, *Business Week*, 17 November 2003. In response to this commonsensical explanation, it is argued that productivity gains have been hitherto repressed by an incapacity to put advanced equipment to proper use—but now ‘learning by doing’ has begun to bear fruit, and we can expect steady gains that could not be secured merely by the putting into place of great swathes of new capital. (Robert Gordon, ‘America wins the prize with a supermarket sweep’, *Financial Times*, 20 August 2003.) But this seems hard to credit. One would expect learning by doing to occur gradually and continuously. Why would advances of this sort have been delayed for almost a decade, then have occurred suddenly and by great leaps? How could such discontinuous technological improvements have gripped enough of the economy to yield such instantaneous huge gains in overall productivity increase?

equipment and software)—rather than securing them without charge via labour intensification—profit-rate gains become harder to achieve. By the same token, more lay-offs and speed-up, and slower wage increase, can only extend the undercutting of aggregate demand that has been pressing the American economy downwards, discouraging investment. In the 22 months following the formal end of the previous six recessions, employment rose on average by 5 per cent and total compensation by 9 per cent. But in the same time-span following the November 2001 trough of the latest recession, non-farm payrolls contracted by about 1 per cent, leaving total private real non-farm compensation unchanged.

Stagnant demand is being reproduced not only by elimination of jobs and reluctance to invest, but also by the feeble pace of new job creation. Over the course of 2002, job losses slowed palpably. But so did the speed of new employment. In fact, the number of jobs created in 2002 was even smaller than in the recession year 2001, dropping to its lowest level since 1995.²⁸ In previous post-war recessions, which were always driven by the contraction of demand as the Federal Reserve tightened interest rates, firms tended to maintain relatively close links with former employees, in the expectation that demand would revive when the Fed loosened. Layoffs thus tended to be 'cyclical', with rapid job creation occurring after the trough of a recession, creating demand for further growth of employment. Over the past six business cycles, in the cyclical upturn that followed the trough of the recession, an average of 50 per cent of the revival of employment occurred in the same industries where it had fallen during the cyclical downturn. In the current conjuncture, there has been a sharp departure from this pattern. Industries that lost jobs during the recession have continued to lose them in the recovery, while—the other side of the coin—fully 70 per cent of new hiring has been 'structural', taking place in industries other than those where the layoffs occurred. It is clearly much more risky to create entirely new jobs than to renew old ones.²⁹

Such a pattern is, of course, just what one would expect from a slowdown resulting, like this one, from a longer-term build-up of system-wide

²⁸ David Leonhardt, 'Slowing Stream of New Jobs Helps to Explain Slump', *New York Times*, 1 October 2003. Unfortunately, data on gross job increase and gross job elimination, as opposed to net job creation, is available only for the recent period.

²⁹ Erica Groshen and Simon Potter, 'Has Structural Change Contributed to a Jobless Recovery?', Federal Reserve Bank of New York, *Current Issues in Economics and Finance*, vol. 9, no. 8, August 2003.

over-capacity in manufacturing, aggravated by the wealth effects of the asset-price bubble from 1995 through 2000. Jobs were created, and increasingly so over the course of the 1990s, that had no hope of being sustained by the growth of demand, except in the shortest of runs. High-technology industries alone, amounting to just 8 per cent of GDP, accounted for one third of the total increase in GDP during the second half of the 1990s. A large part of this output turned out to be superfluous—unsellable at a profit—with the consequence that in 2002 and 2003, 750,000 jobs, or 12 per cent of total employment at the end of 2001, were lost. Many of these will never be re-created, and of those that do reappear, a significant number will be based abroad as a consequence of outsourcing. Not only are cheap-labour manufacturing platforms expanding like wildfire, especially in China; thanks to digitization and improved communications, white-collar and service-sector jobs are also increasingly being relocated, above all to India. By implication, an entirely new set of jobs will have to be created in the US.³⁰ But where will the demand for these arise, given that employment creation is itself such a central aspect of demand creation? The economy apparently faces a major coordination problem, as the New Economy industries that were supposed to make the running prove quite unable to do so.

The Fed's huge stimulus may actually have exacerbated the problem, by braking the shake-out of high-cost, low-profit firms through bankruptcies or mergers. In the third quarter of 2003, after nearly three years of slowdown, capacity utilization in manufacturing stood at 72.9 per cent (with high-tech industries well below this). That was actually lower than in any quarter of 2001 and 2002—and, in fact, lower than in any other quarter of the post-war period, apart from 1982–83 and 1975. This obviously dampens the motivation to invest in new plant, equipment and software—or indeed to add more employees.

VI. CONCLUSION

During the first six months of 2003, the economy floundered. With the Fed appearing to promise to hold down the cost of borrowing, long-term

³⁰ Scott Morrison, '750,000 US high-tech jobs lost in two years', *Financial Times*, 19 November 2003. Data on the numbers employed in high-tech industries at the end of 2000 were not available.

interest rates plummeted to near post-war lows, and investors seeking higher yields piled into the bond market. But when—scarcely drawing breath from an intensifying campaign to head off falling prices—the Fed suddenly announced its belief that the economic outlook was improving, the hitherto over-bought bond market made a violent u-turn and long-term rates shot up with a rapidity unseen for many years. Over the summer, bond prices stabilized. But the anxiety remained that this could be only the beginning—that interest rates would not only correct themselves, but continue to rise, as more rapid growth brought higher prices and greater need for credit. Were they to do so, they would pose a severe risk to stock prices and mortgage borrowing, threatening to unravel the recovery.

Defying the bond market's gloomy prognosis, the stock market rose without cease through most of 2003. Between its February–March 2003 low point and October 2003, the S&P 500 posted a remarkable 33 per cent increase, helping greatly to boost confidence. Yet, in so doing, its price–earnings ratio soared above 35 : 1, quite close to the highest level during the late 90s bubble. Can the market go much higher? Chief executives have been giving expression to their doubts. In autumn 2003, the ratio of sales of shares to purchases by corporate insiders reached an all time record, at 6 : 1.³¹ Although the stock market seems to have priced in the recent rise in corporate profits, and then some, further increases in company earnings could push equity values higher—yet at the same time these appear to have become increasingly vulnerable to shocks, especially an interest-rate rise or dollar fall, leading to a correction.

The mortgage refinance boom has, of course, been driven by a huge fall in interest rates and an unprecedented rise in housing prices. But both these processes appear now to have reversed themselves. Along with other long-term rates, mortgage interest jumped in reaction to the Fed's gaffe of June 2003, and has been creeping up since. In the second quarter of 2003 (the latest for which we have data), home prices rose just 0.78 per cent, the slowest quarterly rate of appreciation since 1996. By September and October, refinancing activity had fallen palpably. According to the Mortgage Bankers Association, US mortgage lending

³¹ Steve Galbraith and Mary Viviano, 'The Missing Piece', *Morgan Stanley US and the Americas Investment Research*, 3 November 2003.

can be expected to plunge from \$3.3 trillion in 2003 to \$1.4 trillion in 2004, as interest rates rise from 5.8 per cent to 6.2 per cent (at 7 per cent, it would zero). If that happens, cash-outs from mortgage borrowing will obviously plummet, weakening what has, up to now, probably been the main basis for the growth of consumption and of GDP. The impact on a financial sector that has, for the past three years, been so heavily dependent for its profits on housing would also be severe.

During the first three quarters of 2003, the US current-account deficit continued to climb to new records, and is expected to reach \$550 billion for the year. This is 13 per cent above the previous high established in 2002, which itself broke the old record set in 2000. The deficit will continue to rise irrepressibly, so long as the dollar is overvalued and the world economy continues to depend on macro-economic stimuli emanating from the US. In September, the American trade balance even in advanced technological goods, where the US is supposed to excel, went a record \$3.9 billion into the red. The consequence, of course, is that the amount of foreign funding needed to cover these deficits has also reached unprecedented levels. The US now has to sell \$1.5 billion worth of assets per day to the rest of the world in order to span the gap. This is twice the amount that was necessary in 1999, despite the fact that, in the meantime, with the economic slowdown and stock-market crash, US assets have become much less desirable. In fact, since late spring 2003, net US monthly capital inflows have fallen precipitously—from \$110.4 billion in May, to \$90.6 billion in June, to \$73.4 billion in July, to \$49.9 billion in August, to a scant \$4.2 billion in September 2003—putting increasing pressure on the currency. By the autumn, after a brief rally driven by rising equity prices and the acceleration of the economy, the dollar had started to fall first against the yen and then the euro.³²

The fate of the dollar

Meanwhile the Bush Administration, in response to the outcry from industrial states bleeding jobs at a devastating rate and in preparation for the 2004 elections, had begun to pressure China—an easy target due to its mammoth trade surplus with the US—to allow the yuan to rise against

³² Chavez, 'Weak capital influx seen choking dollar rally'; Alan Beattie, 'Greenback's fall may prove mixed blessing at home and abroad', *Financial Times*, 8 October 2003.

the dollar. At the September meeting of the G7 in Dubai, Washington broadened its campaign, seeking to force down the dollar across the board. In November, having previously put up tariffs on steel imports in defiance of WTO rules, it slapped quotas on imports of certain clothing items from China. The aim, of course, is to shift some of the burden of the international over-capacity in manufacturing onto its leading partners and rivals, in order to speed the recovery of US jobs and investment.

But it is hard to see what these moves can really accomplish. Neither yuan revaluation nor tariff hikes are likely to do much for the US trade deficit or employment. The increase in imports from China reflects a corresponding decrease in imports of the same goods from other low-cost East Asian countries—Asia's overall share of the American market has actually been declining a bit. By the same token, cheap-labour imports from the PRC include only a small proportion of goods produced by the US industries that have experienced the most severe job losses—computers and electronic equipment, machinery, fabricated metal products and apparel. Moreover, the wage disparity between China and the US is so great that even a 30 per cent revaluation of the yuan is unlikely to be of much help to American producers. At the same time, US retailers enjoy such huge mark-ups on Chinese imports that it is reckoned \$1 trillion in stock-market capitalization would be at risk without them. Wage levels are much closer in Japan, and a revaluation of the yen would initially help US exports. But since it would also be likely to undercut an incipient Japanese economic revival that is highly export-dependent, it would probably not be worth it.³³

The Bush Administration's campaign has accelerated an already ongoing process of dollar decline. Although the US equity market has enjoyed a healthy run-up in terms of dollars, its performance in terms of euros has been much weaker and, expressed in yen, even worse. Weakening overseas demand for stocks has thus been putting ever-increasing downward pressure on the dollar. The steady, if slow, decline in US bond prices has militated in the same direction. Against this background, the Administration's increasingly protectionist thrust has been taken as a sign of its increased determination to force down the dollar, whose exchange rate has now dropped sharply. By November, the euro had

³³ Carolyn Baum, 'Bush Gets Double "D" in Handling China Bra Flap', *Bloomberg.com*, 20 November 2003; 'Currency Wars', *Financial Times*, 8 September 2003.

risen to an all-time high against the dollar, and the yen had reached its highest level in three years.

But, perhaps most destabilizing of all, both Japan and China appear to have begun to reduce their customary purchases of US Treasuries, leaving an increasing part of the US current-account deficit potentially uncovered. Japan has apparently acceded to US wishes and, though still entering the currency market to some extent, has not done so sufficiently to prevent a 9 per cent rise of the yen between August and November. In the case of China, US pressure to revalue has coincided with the Chinese government's own increasing anxieties about economic over-heating and the initial steps to rein it in. In 2003, Chinese GDP growth appears to have zoomed well beyond the expected 9 per cent, industrial production above 16 per cent, and investment in fixed assets beyond 30 per cent. In response, the Chinese government has demanded reductions in purchases of new plant and equipment all across the industrial sector, and required banks to increase their reserves so as to make lending more difficult. Since its purchases of dollars have played a big role in pushing up money supply growth in the PRC to over 20 per cent per annum, Beijing will probably have to cut back on these if it is serious about checking the property bubble in major cities and the worsening over-capacity that grips so many Chinese industries. Like other investors, Beijing may also be worrying about the losses it will suffer on Treasury bonds if US interest rates continue to rise and bond prices to fall; the potential gains it is foregoing by failing to invest in higher yielding assets; and the higher currency losses it will have to sustain the longer it puts off revaluation. Political pressure from the US may thus be making it easier for China to take the step upon which it has already decided.³⁴

Interest rates

Nevertheless, bringing the greenback down carries major risks for Washington. A high dollar in general, and East Asian purchases of dollar-denominated assets in particular, have been indispensable for the American recovery, such as it has been—allowing a hyper-expansionary US monetary policy without upward pressure on interest rates or prices.

³⁴ Jenny Wiggins, 'Asian investors may drop Treasury bonds', *Financial Times*, 8 September 2003; Daniel Bogler, 'Asia backs out of the greenback', *Financial Times*, 23 November 2003 (thanks to Nick Beams for this reference).

Should the dollar continue to fall, us equity and bond values will come directly under stress and inflation will increase. But if the price level rises, so will the cost of borrowing, threatening the low interest rates that have been the ultimate foundation for the cyclical upturn. Any significant rise in interest rates would put an end to the enormous wave of mortgage borrowing that has driven consumption. It would also make it more difficult for the government to finance its enormous—and growing—budgetary deficit without raising interest rates and thereby jeopardizing the recovery, while adding to the downward pressure on asset values. Indeed, given that the rest of the world owns \$7.61 trillion worth of us assets—40 per cent of the us government's tradeable debt, 26 per cent of us corporate bonds, and 13 per cent of us equities—a significant decline of the dollar has the potential to set off a rush to offload these, unleashing a violent downward spiral of currency and asset prices. If the Bush Administration gets its wish, in other words, it may regret ever having made it.

The borrowing and bubbles that have underpinned the us cyclical recovery appear now to be diminishing, putting downward pressure on consumer spending and increasing the vulnerability to asset-price shocks. But if stock prices brake, mortgage cash-outs tail off and the dollar slips further, then faster growth of investment and jobs will have to come sooner rather than later, to prevent another slow-down, or worse. In theory, the sharp rise in us profitability should offer a strong basis for a surge of corporate spending, and the recent, more rapid, GDP growth should push earnings still higher. But, in fact, even at this point, corporate expenditure has failed to materialize to any significant extent. Faster growth of both investment and jobs can probably be expected in the short run, with the usual multiplier effect—particularly in view of the huge stimulus, due to be further amplified this year. Nevertheless, the sustainability of increased dynamism is open to question, especially given the legacy of the post-2001 upturn. Will not more rapid expansion make for higher borrowing costs at a time when households, the government, corporations and the financial sector itself have all become vastly over-extended? Will it not also induce a ballooning current-account deficit, at a time when the dollar is already falling? Can an economy move forward by way of the expansion of service and financial sectors catering to consumption, when key goods-producing sectors remain weighed down by over-capacity and reduced profitability, when overseas producers are grabbing ever-greater shares of the us goods market, when

exports are falling ever further behind imports with no hope of closing the gap at current exchange rates, and when the us depends upon the largesse of East Asian governments to cover its international obligations? The us economy is in uncharted territory. Its capacity to find its way remains in doubt.

A NOTE ON SOURCES

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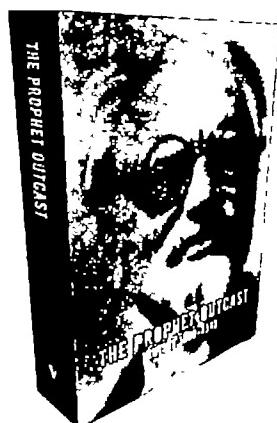
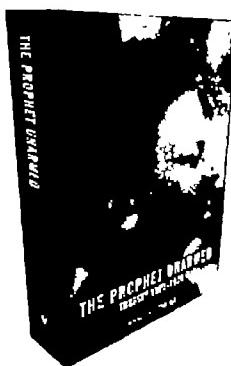
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PLANET OF THE REMAKES

THERE IS A WIDESPREAD critical and popular aversion to remakes of classic—and even not-so-classic—films. They will almost certainly be inferior pieces of work, and if the original is a canonized masterpiece, the remake might even taint its aura. Can the film lover ever see his cherished classic again without thinking of its horrible new *Doppelgänger*? A telling website reaction to the news that Harrison Ford and his new love Calista Flockhart were planning a remake of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* begs:

ALL I CAN SAY IS DON'T DO IT! If Ford and Calista want a film to exhibit their undying love . . . WELL, don't do it in a remake. Find a director that understands love on camera like Paul Thomas Anderson or Patrice Leconte and develop a new project with them. Be ORIGINAL, not Memorex. *Breakfast at Tiffany's* is one of the few perfect films in this world or any other. Leave it be, please.

Such an impassioned plea is more likely to turn up on the internet than in the film critics' columns of the newspapers; but here too there is often a deep antipathy to the very notion of a remake—not just to individual bad examples. The dislike of them is of course fuelled by plenty of uninspired or downright awful remakes, and by the recognition that Hollywood is generally more willing to reprocess ready-made 'content' than to produce a film by an *auteur* like David Lynch, who is forced to seek funding in France. Even more than retreads of previous Hollywood movies, remakes of foreign films are a staple of contemporary US film production, thus transmuting cultural difference into the 'natural' idiom of the American mainstream. Recent examples are *Vanilla Sky* and *The Ring*. This type of copying has the advantage of an original that is less of an obstruction, since it is not so familiar to US audiences. In either case, the studios (now a rather nostalgic name for the film branches of multimedia conglomerates) would rather fall back on

something that has proved to be successful than take anything remotely resembling a risk. One might also point to the phenomenon of the inter-media remake: film versions of tv series (*Mission Impossible*, *Charlie's Angels*, *The Fugitive*), and tv cartoons (*The Flintstones*, *Scooby-Doo*).

If it has reached a new degree of intensity in the past ten years, the tradition of remakes is as old as the culture industry itself. For the classical studio system this was a logical way to exploit its copyrights and its large staff in an industrial manner—often remaking quite recent films. In the mid-fifties *The Philadelphia Story* (1940) was turned into the Cole Porter musical *High Society*. At around the same time, Hitchcock remade his English *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934) in Technicolor with James Stewart and, sadly, Doris Day. Howard Hawks remade his own *Ball of Fire* (1941) as *A Song is Born* (1948), another Technicolor musical. Going back to the French pioneers of the film industry, the Lumière Brothers, one finds that even the mythical ‘first film’ was a remake. There are three versions of the film of workers leaving the Lumière factory in Lyons—the first made in the late summer of 1894, apparently as a trial run, on paper; a second, shot on film, in March 1895 and shown in the legendary first film screening in Paris on March 22nd; the third, which was for a long time believed to be ‘the first film’, was shot in the summer of 1895, with the workers wearing more festive clothes. Perhaps this was supposed to give a more positive image of the Lumière factory. But repetition was already a pillar of the culture industry before the arrival of cinema, in the mass literature of newspaper serials, or *feuilletons*.¹ The same model was also transferred to film: screen serials thrived from the silent days to the 1940s. Each week, one could see part of a continuing story about a hero such as Flash Gordon or Dick Tracy, with a cliffhanger at the end.

In recent decades, sequels and series have been the dominant modes of repetition in film. Aside from the remake, probably no other kind of film has as bad a reputation as the sequel, for which *Another 48 Hours*, *Die Harder* and the ironic *The Naked Gun 2½* and *Naked Gun 3½* are telling titles. Many sequels are indeed a facile cashing-in on recent box-office success—rather than on an older or overseas hit, as in the case of the remake. A sequel usually continues the story of the preceding film, which often means that the same tale is told again with minor

¹ Also in painting: 19th-century painters often made ‘variations’ of their own works, and their studios painted copies. The Goupil art firm even had its own stable of copyists, who churned out replicas of works by famous Salon painters.

differences. One sequel can lead to another and they may come to be described as a series, although some attempts at definition propose a clear distinction between the two—arguing, for instance, that a film series presents separate stories with the same characters, while sequels continue a story where it left off. But do not the various *Die Hard* or *Scream* films amount to a series, each part presenting a more or less distinct plot, although each new film is also building on the earlier ones, as sequels do? On the other hand, the *James Bond* films clearly are not sequels; they form a series with many variations on a basic narrative scheme, without the suggestion of continuity or historical succession between the parts.

Time and return

In his reflections on the vicissitudes of historical time Guy Debord noted that modern temporality, measured in abstract units, is dominated by the alternation of labour and ‘free time’, thus reproducing something like ‘the old cyclical rhythm’ of pre-modern societies. History is perverted from within, thus creating the ‘pseudo-cyclical time’ of spectacle.² In the writings of an author like Mircea Eliade, the ‘old cyclical time’ became the object of a reactionary-romantic idealization. Eliade exulted in the fact that traditional societies knew how to keep history—which is a series of catastrophes—at bay by the ritualistic repetition of mythical archetypes. Eliade complained that today’s quasi-mythic experiences, such as ‘killing time’ by reading or watching a film, are impoverished descendants of his cherished ancient myths. Debord also regarded the time of spectacle as a perverted and impoverished version of the cyclical temporality of myth, but his dialectical analysis is rather less one-dimensional than Eliade’s nostalgic projection.³ Debord notes that a conflict was installed within cyclical time—the ‘childhood of time’—as rulers tried to impose their genealogies and aims on society. The ‘masters of time’ thus managed to give a sense of direction to their culture’s agricultural cycles, creating a new temporal mode *within* the world of cyclical returns that continued to be dominant.⁴ Later, more advanced masters of time would go further in this direction, until capitalist modernity unleashed the

² Guy Debord, *La Société du spectacle* [1967], Paris 1992, p. 151.

³ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, New York 1965, pp. 21, 34; ‘The Myths of the Modern World’, in *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries. The Encounter Between Archaic Faiths and Archaic Reality*, London 1968, pp. 23–38.

⁴ Debord, *Société du spectacle*, pp. 129–32.

forces of history to the full. But it is precisely then that a reversal occurs, as an apparently triumphant linear history is transformed into pseudo-cyclical returns. This is still within the framework of the historical direction created by the capitalist juggernaut, but these pseudo-cyclical returns tend to create a 'false consciousness of time'—spectacle, or parcelled and industrialized myth. Just as myth once established a reign of returns, of *Wiederkehr*, so now our media culture does the same, but in a much more planned manner. Not only the alternation of work and spare time but the media products, so important within the latter, are ruled by repetition. William Burroughs contended that the mass media play a similar role, in this respect, to the ceremonial Mayan calendar, a complicated construction with which a priestly elite 'in effect controlled what the populace did, thought and felt on any given day'—creating a pre-ordained cyclical empire-time run by temporal masters.⁵

Eliade's mythical archetypes were located in a distant, sacred era, before the time of man. By contrast, the semi-cyclical returns of modern series and sequels are ruled by models which lay claim to no origin of any kind. They are *de-historicized* myths, apparently timeless programmes. The characters of soap operas seem to inhabit a world that consists of the eternal returns of a limited number of plots, as do the protagonists of film series like *Die Hard* and *James Bond*. All Bond films seem to follow a certain archetypal plot, of which one version may be a better approximation than another, but not a more original one (although there is, of course, nostalgia for the time—in the sixties—when the Bond formula seemed fresh). What differentiates remakes from such serial repetition is the fact that the remake has a specific historical source: the 'original' film. This can be regarded as a *historicization* of the mythical, archetypal model. Because films that are remade exist in historical—not some primeval, mythic—time, their repetition raises protests from those who revere the original. Whether they offer any of the healing rejuvenation of time which Eliade ascribed to the older myths' repetition is obviously questionable. Of course, the repetitions and returns of mass culture clearly entail a *Lustgewinn* for the viewer: although similarity must be alleviated by variation, enjoyment comes at least as much from the reproduction of what is familiar as from its modulation by what is new. But the one-sided exploitation of repetition in its most facile forms, to streamline production and minimize financial

⁵ 'Control', in Daniel Odier, *The Job. Interviews with William S. Burroughs*, New York 1989, p. 38.

risks, deadens rather than recharges time—even if the consumers feel momentarily rejuvenated.

A thousand eyes

An exemplary case of the interweaving of remakes, sequels, serials and series is offered by the avatars of the *Mabuse* character. Dr Mabuse was created by Norbert Jacques as a master criminal, within the *feuilleton* tradition of *Fantômas*—a mythical super-villain who time and again fools the law, making him the perfect ‘hero’ of his own series. After being serialized in print Dr Mabuse was brought to the big screen by Fritz Lang in *Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler* (1922), a two-part UFA prestige production. Lang used lavish sets, leading actor Rudolf Klein-Rogge and a meandering storyline to paint a panorama of a decadent society—Weimar Germany—so weak that it can easily fall prey to the evil master-mind Mabuse, a hypnotist who can submit people to his will. One of the most memorable scenes shows Mabuse’s head, facing the camera against a black background, growing ever closer and appearing to hypnotize the audience as well as his unfortunate opponent in the film. With its overt ambition to give a portrait of the times, and Lang’s highly stylized and sumptuous scenes, the first *Mabuse* film claimed both artistic value (as opposed to ‘unsophisticated’ Hollywood entertainment) and *kulturkritische* ambition. Weimar cinema, and Lang’s in particular, could certainly put on airs; Siegfried Kracauer mocked the fact that at the première of Lang’s film *Spione* (1928), Thea von Harbou’s novel—a movie tie-in—was offered to the viewers bound in leather, as if it were a literary classic.⁶ But the master-criminal Mabuse could not shake off his origins in mass culture. For all its production values and aspirations to social critique, *Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler* has a hopelessly hackneyed and melodramatic plot.

At the end of *Der Spieler*, the hunted Mabuse goes mad from fear. This suggests that Lang did not consider the possibility of a sequel. A decade later, however, he made *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse* (1933), his last German film for years to come. Lang and von Harbou chose a remarkable approach: rather than miraculously restoring Mabuse to health, or simply ignoring the end of the previous film, they show him still in the lunatic asylum. Whereas the parts of series such as *Sherlock Holmes* or *Bond* films return to a stereotyped beginning each time—

⁶ ‘Film 1928’, in *Das Ornament der Masse*, Frankfurt 1977, p. 306.

thus putting in train a story that combines well-known elements with some variation—Lang's Mabuse (again played by Klein-Rogge) has a history. In contrast to Holmes or even Bond, who merely adapt themselves to historical changes in order to remain the same, Mabuse does not exist in a cyclical universe. To be sure, he is in the grip of compulsive repetition: Lang shows him in his cell, frantically scribbling notes on paper—the 'testament' of the film's title. Even in this condition, he is still planning evil deeds. When Mabuse-like crimes start to occur once more in the outside world, Kommissar Lohmann (Otto Wernicke) investigates whether he might be leading a criminal organization from his cell. The asylum's director assures Lohmann that this is impossible. When Mabuse dies, later in the film, the crimes go on. It turns out that the director himself has been acting as a new Mabuse, using the plans scrawled by his patient. By means of a double exposure, Lang suggests that Mabuse's spirit has somehow taken possession of the doctor. In killing his first protagonist and making the asylum director his 'successor', Lang suggests that 'Mabuse' is not so much a character as a role, a position in the symbolic realm that can be filled by various people. Nevertheless, this still entails repetition, even if not here by the 'original' Mabuse, but his stand-in. Lang's attempts to historicize the character were thus frustrated by the need to use a recognizable Mabuse-pattern, in order to have a reason to make a *Mabuse* film.

Kommissar Lohmann was a familiar character from Lang's previous film *M* (1931), with which *Das Testament* has much in common. The latter thus not only functions as a sequel to *Der Spieler*, but also as an 'unofficial' sequel to *M*—a double return. The virtually autonomous world of the mob in *M*, and its ruthless mock-trial of the Peter Lorre character, have habitually been interpreted as an allegory for the rise of Nazism in Germany, a view sometimes extended to the *Mabuse* sequel. But although the Mabuse character can be described as a kind of anarcho-fascist, the connexion with Nazism is not made explicit in *Das Testament*. It was only in his final *Mabuse* film, *Die tausend Augen des Dr. Mabuse* (1960), that Lang would draw an overt parallel. The film was the result of Lang's collaboration with German producer Artur Brauner who, in the late fifties, tried to interest Lang in directing remakes of his Weimar films, including *Die Nibelungen* (1924) and a musical version of his 1921 *Der müde Tod*. Instead, Lang and Brauner remade a film that Lang had co-scripted but had not been allowed to direct: *Das indische Grabmal* (Joe May, 1921). Almost at the end of his career, Lang

revisited his beginnings in the film industry, trying to rewrite his own history by finally shooting *The Indian Tomb* himself. But the resultant two-part film, *Das indische Grabmal/Der Tiger von Eschnapur* (1959) was a half-hearted attempt to recapture past glories. There were some apparent 'modernizations' (sound and colour being the most prominent), but a film that might have been an interesting clash of the contemporary and the anachronistic managed only to be corny and formulaic.

Escape routes to history

Brauner then coaxed Lang into reviving Dr Mabuse. Lang signed on, in the knowledge that Brauner now owned the character's copyright and could make a *Mabuse* film with or without him. But he only consented to bring back the role, not the individual: 'No, the bastard is dead and buried'.⁷ Once again, the historicity of the *Mabuse* universe was affirmed. Lang also refused to give in to Brauner's demand to make the new character the biological son of Dr Mabuse; the role was not to be restricted to members of the same family. In the resultant film, *Die tausend Augen des Dr. Mabuse*, one of the policemen explains to his colleagues that Dr Mabuse had been a master criminal, active just before 'Hitler and the brown spectre' came along. The real-life counterpart of the anarcho-fascist can now, finally, be named. The new 'Mabuse' has taken over a hotel built by the ss for spying on important foreign visitors and equipped it with the latest cctv equipment, in order to blackmail the guests. He wants to wreak as much havoc as possible and rise to power once more on the ruins of a crumbling world. 'Mabuse' is being hunted by Gert Fröbe—later to play Goldfinger in the Bond film of the same name—as Kommissar Kras, a fat Prussian in the style of Lohmann. But the 'Mabuse' he hunts is only a name and a mentality. After all, 'the bastard is dead', and it is another criminal genius who is continuing Mabuse's work in a variety of disguises. It is as if Mabuse were a neurotic, driven to constant repetition: '[the patient] is driven to repeat the repressed matter as an experience in the present, instead of remembering it as something belonging to the past, which is what the physician would much rather see'.⁸ Psychoanalysis attempts to reintroduce history on an individual scale, breaking through the individual's world of eternal return.

⁷ Patrick McGilligan, *Fritz Lang: Nature of the Beast*, New York 1997, p. 437.

⁸ Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920), in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' and Other Writings, London 2003, p. 56.

In trying to historicize Mabuse, Lang functioned as the doctor's analyst. But the treatment was only partially successful. Not only did Mabuse's typical behaviour linger in his films like a neurotic repetition, even after the doctor's death, but Mabuse himself was resurrected after *Die tausend Augen*—Lang's last film. Critics like Jonathan Crary regard the *Mabuse* films as a Fritz Lang trilogy, but in Brauner's eyes Lang's final work was just the stepping-stone for a profitable series of low-budget movies.⁹ Companies churning out serials—Edgar Wallace thrillers, Karl May Westerns and Heinz Erhardt comedies—dominated the postwar German film industry. Brauner's enterprise was one of them, and in some respects his *Mabuse* films are comparable to the popular Edgar Wallace series. Both abound with formulaic horror and suspense, and teem with master-criminals possessed of secret identities and ruthless organizations. *Die tausend Augen* already bore a certain resemblance to the Wallace films, although it is made more interesting through the surveillance plot device, which is rather less silly than many of the storylines that would follow. In these films, Dr Mabuse has risen from the dead, for which no explanation is given at all. He is even played by Wolfgang Preiss, who played the 'new' Mabuse in *Die tausend Augen*.

Without Lang, Brauner was at last free to dispense with Mabuse's historicity and make him a comic-book villain, endowed with eternal life. One of the post-Lang films was a 1962 remake of *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse*, in which Mabuse dies yet again, but this time without any consequences for subsequent films. Historical logic is further undermined by the fact that Gert Fröbe, who played Kommissar Kras in *Die tausend Augen*, plays Kommissar Lohmann in the *Testament* remake. An immortal Dr Mabuse and an archetypically fat Prussian policeman with varying names seem to be trapped in an eternal mythic-neurotic return of bizarre plots—a cyclical rather than historical world. Mabuse, the serial villain, has been reclaimed by the repetitive culture industry from which he originated.

Varioria of Lem

The recent attempt to integrate Stanislaw Lem's science-fiction novel *Solaris* (1961) into this industry proved to be a rather more difficult undertaking, which ended in artistic as well as commercial shipwreck.

⁹ Jonathan Crary, 'Dr Mabuse and Mr Edison', in Kerry Brougher, ed., *Art and Film since 1945: Hall of Mirrors*, Los Angeles 1996, pp. 262–75.

Lem's novel, itself a highly cogent meditation on historicity and repetition, revolves around the mysterious planet Solaris and the (future) science of Solaristics, devoted to its comprehension. Solaris is covered by a strange ocean, about which there has been much speculation—some consider it to be a living and sentient being. Solarist Kris Kelvin is sent to the space station Prometheus, orbiting the planet, where he finds that one of the Solarists residing there, Gibarian, is dead; another, Sartorius, hides in his laboratory and a third, Snow (Snaut in the original), is in a highly agitated state of mind.¹⁰ The station, it transpires, has 'visitors' who materialize at night—three-dimensional reproductions of someone whom the person 'visited' once knew and who are there when they wake up. Kelvin himself starts awake to find his former wife Rheyia, who committed suicide ten years before, in his room.

This disturbing phenomenon appears to be caused by the enigmatic, intractable ocean, and began after the scientists exposed it to radiation. 'Perhaps the ocean reacted to the irradiation with a counter-irradiation, perhaps it probed our brains and penetrated to some kind of psychic tumour', Snow says: 'isolated psychic processes, enclosed, stifled, encysted—foci smouldering under the ashes of memory.'¹¹ The 'visitors' appear to be distantly related to mimoids, strange plant-like structures which occasionally appear from the surface of the ocean, and which have the habit of shaping themselves into crude imitations of objects that are close to them. Solaris is a mimetic planet. The intention—if any—behind these copies remains unclear. Are the visitors sent to the scientists to torture them, or are they an attempt to communicate?

Solaris seems tailor-made for an 'extremely conventional psychoanalytical interpretation' in terms of the Freudian uncanny.¹² As in the case of neurosis, but in a less permanent and pathological way, a repetition-compulsion manifests itself in the uncanny. Freud mentions that he once walked through an Italian town and repeatedly ended up in the

¹⁰ Names differ in the various versions of *Solaris*. The Polish Snaut became Snow in the English translation of Lem's novel; Hari became Khari in Russian and Rheyia in English. Henceforth I will use the names that appear in the English version of the novel, from which Steven Soderbergh also worked, although in his film Kris Kelvin became Chris Kelvin.

¹¹ Stanislaw Lem, *Solaris* (1961), London 2001, p. 77.

¹² Neil Easterbrook, 'The Sublime Simulacra: Repetition, Reversal, and Re-covery in Lem's *Solaris*', *Critique*, vol. 36, no. 3 (1995), p. 177.

red-light district, no matter how hard he tried to avoid it.¹³ When such things occur, we fear for a moment that the world is alive, haunted by spirits that bear us a grudge; we relapse into a ‘primitive’, animistic attitude where the self has no clear boundaries. The eminently Freudian phenomenon of the *Doppelganger* is an after-effect of this phase, but in *Solaris* people struggle with doubles not of themselves but of people from their past on earth, who have somehow been reproduced by the ocean. Kris is thrown into a panic by the first Rheyas double, and he sends her off into space. When the second copy (or the third Rheyas in all) appears, he gradually comes to accept and love her as another, different person—‘If you really were her, I might not be able to love you’. He deludes himself into thinking that they could go on living on the space station, or even travel back to earth.¹⁴ However, ‘Rheya’ herself, when she finds out the truth, cannot live with the fact that she is not Reya but a ‘visitor’. Like the original Reya, she commits suicide, creating another repetition. Kelvin seems to be doomed to repeat his history with Reya neurotically, rather than relegating her to memory. When he sees the second Reya double as a new Reya, he sees her not as a faithful copy but as a differing *remake*.¹⁵ But it is exactly this that traps him in neurosis after he has overcome the initial shock of the uncanny; it is the illusion of difference, of newness, that leads to an embrace of sameness. Even if the latter is what is truly desired, it has to be realized through a detour.

In Lem’s novel, the visitors stop returning after Sartorius exposes the ocean to transmissions of Kelvin’s brainwaves, so there seems to be no hope a fourth Reya will appear:

I hoped for nothing. And yet I lived in expectation. Since she had gone, that was all that remained. I did not know what achievements, what mockery, even what tortures still awaited me. I knew nothing, and I persisted in the faith that the time of cruel miracles was not past.¹⁶

What else could the miracle be but another Reya? At the end of Tarkovsky’s 1972 film of *Solaris*, a time of cruel miracles seems to be in full swing, but this does not directly involve Reya. Tarkovsky’s version contains less Solarist debate about the ocean and the problem of knowing an alien intelligence (if such it is), but he attunes us to the strange

¹³ Sigmund Freud, ‘The Uncanny’ (1919), in *The Uncanny*, London 2003, p. 144.

¹⁴ *Solaris*, p. 153.

¹⁵ Easterbrook, ‘The Sublime Simulacra’, pp. 180–1.

¹⁶ *Solaris*, p. 214.

nature of the planet by including the video testimony of Berton, a Solarist who explored the planet's surface, with traumatic consequences. At the beginning of the film, Berton, now an old man, has come to Kelvin's father's country house to show Kelvin the tape. The space station itself is depicted by Tarkovsky as somewhat dilapidated, a haunted house in space. At the end of the film Kris has apparently returned to earth, as we see him once again near his father's house, familiar from the opening scenes. Tarkovsky's camera once again roves past the brook and the pond until he gets to the wooden house. The camera travels up into the air, and we see that the house stands on a little island in the Solaris ocean. Since we have learnt earlier on that after the radiation experiment small islands formed on the surface of the ocean, we are left to surmise that this is such an island, and the planet's 'cruel experiment' has entered a new phase. The image, of course, is not less staggering and unexplained for that, but it does suggest that Kelvin has fallen back into a circular world of eternal returns.

Time homogenized

Although Steven Soderbergh has emphasized that his version of *Solaris* (2002) is based on Lem's novel and not on Tarkovsky's film, it cannot quite escape being seen as a remake of the latter. It benefits from the fact that 'foreign' remakes seem to have a certain critical advantage in the American press, where they are less frequently, and less negatively, compared to the originals. Soderbergh exchanges Tarkovsky's slow pace for much quicker cuts and his dingy space station for shiny chrome. Only the rain in the scenes on earth seems to be a kind of homage to Tarkovsky—in the form of a facile quote of one of his signature ingredients. In Soderbergh's *Solaris*, the focus is on the humans; despite the computer-generated images, the planet and its ocean have almost been restricted to cameo appearances. The whole science of Solaristics has been scrapped. Kelvin is no longer a Solarist but a psychologist, dispatched to the space station because he happens to be a friend of Gibarian, who has sent a video message requesting his help. Soderbergh takes care to emphasize that the space station has been bought from NASA by a private company, and that its scientists (including a black woman, Dr Gordon, who replaces Sartorius) are looking for ways to exploit the planet commercially. In itself this is a witty 'update' of the story: long deliberations on the possibility of communication with an alien intelligence have given way to the desire to make profit. However,

like many of Soderbergh's contrivances, this tends to undermine Lem's carefully crafted universe. After all, who in their right mind would think of exploiting the bizarre, unapproachable ocean-planet of Lem's novel? But then, *Solaris* has largely been stripped of its alien presence and reduced to a fancy CGI background.

One of the great achievements of Tarkovsky's *Solaris* was its sense of place, in the dilapidated Prometheus station. With it came a sense of time, a sanatorium-time in which normal life and even causality seem to have been suspended. In this unreal temporality, Kelvin's encounter with his late wife can develop its dramatic potential. Narrative connexions are often implicit, and sometimes the action is seemingly arrested for long shots—Berton's car ride back to the city at the beginning of the film, a scene in the snow, a tracking shot over a Brueghel painting—that defy conventional cinematic logic and can function like flashbacks, showing images from a past life on earth. But such parentheses are devoid of the normal rhetoric of flashbacks: they are presented as images that are neither more nor less real than the others—they are simply silent. The problem with the incessant Hollywood-style flashbacks to Kelvin's past life with Rhea in Soderbergh's film is that they prevent the doubles of Rhea from becoming distinct presences. They are anecdotal and talkative, creating a sense of sameness and continuity. It is impossible to sense that Kelvin actually falls in love with the third Rhea as a different person, however deluded he may be. Putting more emphasis on the love story than either Lem or Tarkovsky, Soderbergh no doubt thought he was making a more touching (and more commercially viable) film, but he ended up making a less engaging one. The images of the past obscure the drama of its uncanny re-manifestation in the space station, and gradual transformation into an unreal present.

The end of Soderbergh's film is an unconvincing attempt to outdo both Lem and Tarkovsky. Here Snow—a youngish computer nerd in this version—turns out to be Snow's 'visitor', who has killed the real Snow. This sudden return to the classical form of the *Doppelganger*, no doubt intended as a mind-bender, only muddles things. Lem and Tarkovsky kept the nature of the other visitors vague, but implied that the 'foci smouldering under the ashes of memory' which the ocean taps have to do with lovers and relatives—those in whom our deepest emotions are invested. In an access of narcissism, this might conceivably be Snow himself; but Soderbergh merely exploits the conceit for a quick thrill.

After this bizarre dénouement, the Snow double points out that Solaris is expanding and drawing the space station into it. Kelvin decides not to leave with Gordon in the rescue pod, but to plunge with the space station into Soderbergh's Solaris. He appears to end up in some kind of New Age heaven, reunited with Rhea, who assures him that it doesn't matter if they are dead or alive, and that all their sins have been forgiven. This finale is perhaps an attempt to equal Tarkovsky in finding a cinematic equivalent for Lem's 'time of cruel miracles', but Soderbergh veers off into regions closer to the spectacular esotericism of M. Night Shyamalan (*The Sixth Sense, Signs*). The repeated use of the Dylan Thomas poem, 'And Death Shall Have No Dominion', also suggests that Soderbergh was less interested in exploring his precursors' dialectic of repetition and historicity, personal or cosmic, than in creating the semblance of a meditation on a rosy-fingered afterlife.

Soderbergh has been commended by some for making a courageous move and paying for it with box-office failure—suggesting that the film was too good for a conservative, manipulated audience. In fact, his version is a half-hearted attempt to make Lem's story more palatable to a film culture in which Tarkovsky's *Solaris*—the product of a very different society, in which it did not exactly fit comfortably either—could not be made. With its ambiguous probing into repetition and historicity, *Solaris* could be used to question the current culture of the remake. As a planet of remakes, *Solaris* is the uncanny double of Planet Hollywood. But by grafting clichéd flashbacks and New Age spirituality onto the material, Soderbergh tried to make it part of Hollywood rather than its double—to no avail. For contrary to the case of Dr Mabuse, there is too much in the earlier versions of *Solaris* that resists. If Soderbergh's space oddity stands out in today's commercial film culture, it does so by default.

Appropriating the remake

The 'actually existing remake' is in the thrall of the original, much as series and sequels are in the grip of formulaic plots and other industrial archetypes. This industry of repetition sparks off reactions that preserve elements from the romantic-modernist cult of originality: 'Be ORIGINAL, not Memorex'. But much as the current practice of remakes and other forms of repetition seem to warrant opposition, mere rejection not only misses what is most problematic in them, but fails to notice the dormant potential of the remake, the promise inherent in repetition. For if

repetition could be perverted from within, exacerbating the newness that disguises sameness until it changed its sign, might there not be a kind of remake in which repetition served difference, rather than enforcing mythic identity?

The Janus-face of repetition becomes especially clear in opposing interpretations of Nietzsche's vertiginous thoughts on the Eternal Return. For Walter Benjamin, whose notion of *Jetztzeit*—now-time—sought to imagine a revolutionary mode of historical repetition, Nietzsche's idea was clearly a case of the return of mythic cyclical time in the commodified dream-world of the late nineteenth century.¹⁷ By contrast, Gilles Deleuze saw in it a hijacking of mythical return for entirely different purposes—Nietzsche would have accomplished nothing less than the liberation of a radical core from the old cyclical conception of time, by suggesting an eternal repetition without original, without model or archetype, in decentred circles not dependent on any original myth.¹⁸ The 'same' that returns is not a repetition of an 'original' in a 'copy'; it is the return itself that is repeated, the act of repetition. This is not a process that creates copies of an original, but one that creates difference by generating 'false pretenders', deviant signs, bad simulacra.¹⁹ Most remakes remain bound to the original, which they attempt to 'modernize' (and, if it is a foreign film, to 'Americanize') by introducing today's style, stars, topics and the like. But a different practice of the remake is possible: one that sees the 'original' not as a *Vorbild* to be followed (if only for its rudimentary storyline), but as something to be questioned and perverted.

This kind of remake could be a free variation or permutation, which actualizes an implicit possibility. A classic Hollywood example that comes close to this is Hawks's *His Girl Friday* (1940), one of various film versions of the play *The Front Page*, in which the male reporter is swapped for a female one. But perhaps the best example of such an approach would not be a remake, strictly speaking, but a kind of hostile takeover of a film series. In *Alphaville* Godard adapted the hero of a cheap b-movie series (Lemmy Caution) and the actor who portrayed him (Eddie Constantine) for his own ends. But this kind of free remake is not the only option. Slavoj Žižek has noted that one could just as well fashion a *literal* remake

¹⁷ Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, Frankfurt 1991, pp. 177–8.

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et répétition*, Paris 1968, pp. 92, 123–5, 383–4.

¹⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, Paris 1969, pp. 295–6.

that would follow the first film in an extremely faithful, detailed way, allowing the unavoidable differences to serve as symptoms underlining the fact that the exact moment and its meaning cannot be recreated.²⁰ At the time when Brauner proposed various remakes to him, Lang apparently contemplated such a literal remake of Murnau's *Faust* (1926). Gus Van Sant came close to this with his version of *Psycho* (1998). In a deliberate departure from the dominant practice, he largely refrained from trying to make the film more 'of its time' by closely following the original script and *mise-en-scène*. In doing so, Van Sant courted critical and commercial disaster, where Soderbergh merely blundered into it. The result is a strange film which lacks the compelling actors and directorial grace-notes of Hitchcock's original, but does afford a somewhat uncanny experience. For precisely by following Hitchcock's film in a way that could be seen as a ritual repetition of a historical model, he poses the question of its specificity—that is, its peculiar combination of relevance and obsolescence. Regrettably, however, Van Sant could not resist making some changes that compromised the conceptual clarity of his exercise.

Historicization from within

The exact, literalist remake can be taken to an extreme by appropriation. After all, a literal reproduction through selection and presentation still alters the original. Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* (1993), in which a projection of Hitchcock's film is protracted over 24 hours (thus appearing as a series of stills), was in this sense a very interesting remake of *Psycho*. If apparent newness can disguise repetition, a literal repetition can produce difference. In either case, the point of such a remake is not to extract a film from its time and adapt it, but to look at our culture from the standpoint of that film—through a version of it. In the media-mythic culture of repetition, the first film becomes an original whose repetition is seen as dependent upon and hence inferior to it. But the remake should be a transformation from within, an auto-deconstruction and reconstruction; not something done to a film, but done from and with a film. The result could yield a messianic now-time, anachronistic non-identity or any number of bewildering admixtures of the two.

A particularly intriguing recent remake, and one that defies easy classification, is Stan Douglas's *Journey into Fear* (2001). This film installation combines elements from Orson Welles's *Journey into Fear* of 1942

²⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom!*, New York 2001, pp. 206–7.

(Welles was replaced as director by Norman Foster half-way through filming) and its 1975 remake by Daniel Mann, with excerpts from Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man*. Douglas notes that Mann's remake is 'uncharacteristically, an improvement over the original.'²¹ In the admittedly rather mediocre movie of 1942—itself based on a novel by Eric Ambler—Joseph Cotten plays Graham, an American arms dealer in the Second World War, who tries to leave Turkey by boat. Among the passengers is a German spy called Möller who wants to kill him. In the remake, the 1940s setting has given way to the oil crisis of the early 1970s. Graham has been transformed into a surveyor of petroleum deposits in Turkey, while Möller works for an organization that would gain a large profit if the information Graham is carrying were to arrive in the United States six weeks later. Douglas regards the transition from government operative to agent of corporations as indicative of 'the passage from a world in which power is brokered by politics to one in which finance is the preferred medium of influence'.²²

Douglas's own 2001 remake, or meta-remake, is a film installation in which a looped piece of film of about 15 minutes is accompanied by a soundtrack with 625 permutations, which takes 157 hours to play in its entirety. The film shows a series of exchanges between Graham (who is here a woman) and Möller, who tries to convince Graham to delay the boat's entry into the harbour, which again seems to entail financial benefits for someone. The dialogue contains lines taken from Melville's novel, in which various avatars of what appears to be the same mythical fraudster trick travellers on the Mississippi steamboat *Fidèle*. With their oddly permuted dialogues on a freight ship, also called *Fidèle*, Douglas's Graham and Möller seem to be trapped in a world in which business means an endless, circular con-game:

Proponents of the so-called New Economy propose that we live in a perpetual present and care as much about the future as they do about the past. *Journey into Fear* is an endless, cyclical voyage but, as one gradually becomes aware of its structure, one can at least intuit how the future became history.²³

With Douglas, the remake becomes a form of speculative history rather than reprocessed content.

²¹ Stan Douglas, *Journey into Fear*, Köln 2002, p. 135.

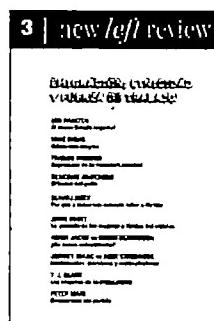
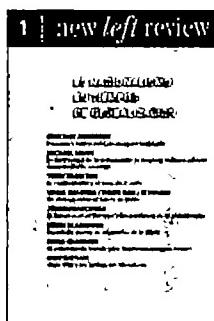
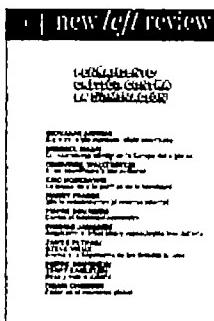
²² Douglas, *Journey into Fear*, p. 136. ²³ Douglas, *Journey into Fear*, p. 137.

Contemporary artists like Douglas are in the process of appropriating the remake from the film industry. Perhaps the peculiar economy of the art world makes it a more suitable sphere for the realization of remakes that resist the dominant culture of repetition. But wherever it originates, the hope held out by the remake lies in the liberation of the dormant possibilities of mass culture—its utopian potential. The vicious circle of standardized remake production—its frozen movement of mythical signs—needs to be derailed. It is intrinsic to these signs that such a practice is possible. The myths of the media themselves harbour a potential to generate second-degree myths that offer glimpses of what Barthes called a ‘true mythology’, in which myth is fleetingly transformed by reason and history.²⁴ This would necessarily involve a more complex interplay of *mythos* and *logos* than the rationalized irrationality of the culture industry permits. Such glimmerings can appear only at irregular intervals. It is not just corporate legal actions against ‘copyright infringement’, serious as these are, that stand in the way. This kind of remake cannot be mass-produced with industrialized, pseudo-cyclical regularity.

²⁴ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Paris 1957, p. 222

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THE PARALLAX VIEW

IN TODAY'S ENGLISH, 'pig' refers to the animals with which farmers deal, while 'pork' is the meat we consume. The class dimension is clear here: 'pig' is the old Saxon word, since Saxons were the underprivileged farmers, while 'pork' comes from the French *porque*, used by the privileged Norman conquerors who mostly consumed the pigs raised by farmers. This duality, signalling the gap that separates production from consumption, is a case of what, in his formidable *Transcritique*. On Kant and Marx, Kojin Karatani refers to as the 'parallax' dimension.¹ Best known as the most striking Japanese literary critic of his generation—his *Origins of Japanese Literature* presented to the English-speaking world by Fredric Jameson—Karatani has moved from subsequent reflections on *Architecture as Metaphor* to one of the most original attempts to recast the philosophical and political bases of opposition to the empire of capital of the current period.² In its heterodox theoretical ambition and concern with alternative revolutionary traditions—here principally anarchist—*Transcritique* might be compared with Roberto Unger's trilogy *Politics*, a work out of Brazil. But Karatani's thought-world is closer to that of Marx, and behind him to the heritage of classical German philosophy.

Karatani starts with the question: what is the appropriate response when we are confronted with an antinomy in the precise Kantian sense of the term? His answer is that we should renounce all attempts to reduce one aspect of it to the other (or, even more, to enact a kind of 'dialectical synthesis' of the opposites). One should, on the contrary, assert antinomy as irreducible, and conceive the point of radical critique not as a determinate position as opposed to another position, but as the irreducible gap between the positions—the purely structural interstice between them. Kant's stance is thus to see things 'neither from his own viewpoint, nor from the viewpoint of others, but to face the reality that is exposed

through difference (parallax).³ Karatani reads the Kantian notion of the *Ding an sich* (the Thing-in-itself, beyond phenomena) not so much as a transcendental entity beyond our grasp, but as what is discernible only via the irreducibly antinomic character of our experience of reality.

Theories of value

According to Karatani, when Marx was faced with the opposition between classical political economy (Ricardo and his labour theory of value—the counterpart to philosophical rationalism) and the neo-classical reduction of value to a purely relational entity without substance (Bailey—the counterpart to philosophical empiricism), his ‘critique of political economy’ accomplished exactly the same breakthrough towards the parallax view. Marx treated this opposition as a Kantian antinomy—that is, value has to originate both outside circulation, in production, *and within circulation*. ‘Marxism’ after Marx—in both its Social Democratic and Communist versions—lost this parallax perspective and regressed to a unilateral elevation of production as the site of truth, as against the ‘illusory’ spheres of exchange and consumption. As Karatani emphasizes, even the most sophisticated theory of reification—that of commodity fetishism—falls into this trap, from the young Lukács through Adorno up to Jameson. The way these thinkers accounted for the lack of a revolutionary movement was to argue that the consciousness of workers was obfuscated by the seductions of consumerist society and/or manipulation by the ideological forces of cultural hegemony. Hence the shift in the focus of their critical work to cultural criticism (the so-called ‘cultural turn’)—in others, the disclosure of the ideological (or libidinal: here lies the key role of psychoanalysis in Western Marxism) mechanisms that keep workers under the spell of bourgeois ideology. In a close reading of Marx’s analysis of the commodity-form, Karatani grounds the insurmountable persistence of the parallax gap in the *salto mortale* that a product has to accomplish in order to assert itself as a commodity:

¹ See Kojin Karatani, *Transcritique. On Kant and Marx*, Cambridge, MA 2003. Henceforth TKM.

² *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, Durham, NC 1993; *Architecture as Metaphor: Language, Number, Money*, Cambridge, MA 1995. For Karatani’s position within the Japanese critical field, see Asada Akira, ‘A Left within the Place of Nothingness’, NLR 5, September–October 2000, pp. 24, 35–36.

³ TKM, p. 3.

The price [of iron expressed in gold], while on the one hand indicating the amount of labour-time contained in the iron, namely its value, at the same time signifies the pious wish to convert the iron into gold, that is to give the labour-time contained in the iron the form of universal social labour-time. If this transformation fails to take place, then the ton of iron ceases to be not only a commodity but also a product; since it is a commodity only because it is not a use-value for its owner, that is to say his labour is only really labour if it is useful labour for others, and it is useful for him only if it is abstract general labour. It is therefore the task of the iron or of its owner to find that location in the world of commodities where iron attracts gold. But if the sale actually takes place, as we assume in this analysis of simple circulation, then this difficulty, the *salto mortale* of the commodity, is surmounted. As a result of this alienation—that is its transfer from the person for whom it is a non-use-value to the person for whom it is a use-value—the ton of iron proves to be in fact a use-value and its price is simultaneously realized, and merely imaginary gold is converted into real gold.⁴

This jump by means of which a commodity is sold and thus effectively constituted as a commodity is not the result of an immanent self-development of (the concept of) Value, but a *salto mortale* comparable to a Kierkegaardian leap of faith, a temporary and fragile 'synthesis' between use-value and exchange-value comparable to the Kantian synthesis between sensibility and understanding: in both cases, two levels irreducibly external to each other are brought together. For this precise reason, Marx abandoned his original project (discernible in the *Grundrisse* manuscripts) of 'deducing' in a Hegelian way the split between exchange-value and use-value from the very concept of Value. In *Capital*, the split of these two dimensions, the 'dual character of a merchandise', is the starting point. The synthesis has to rely on an irreducibly external element, as in Kant where being is not a predicate (i.e., cannot be reduced to a conceptual predicate of an entity), or as in Saul Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*, in which the reference of a name to an object cannot be grounded in the content of this name, in the properties it designates.

The very tension between the processes of production and circulation is thus once again that of a parallax. Yes, value is created in the production process; however, it is created there as it were only potentially, since it is only *actualized* as value when the produced commodity is sold and the circle M-C-M is thus completed. The temporal gap between the

⁴ Karl Marx, 'A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy', in *Collected Works*, vol. 29, New York 1976, p. 390.

production of value and its realization is crucial here: even if value is created in production, without the successful completion of the process of circulation, there *stricto sensu* is no value—the temporality is here that of the *futur antérieur*, i.e., value ‘is’ not immediately, it only ‘will have been’. It is retroactively actualized, performatively enacted. In production, value is generated ‘in itself’, while only through the completed circulation process does it become ‘for itself’. This is how Karatani resolves the Kantian antinomy of value which is *and is not* generated in the process of production. It is because of this gap between in- and for-itself that capitalism needs formal democracy and equality:

What precisely distinguishes capital from the master-slave relation is that the worker confronts him as consumer and possessor of exchange values, and that in the form of the possessor of money, in the form of money he becomes a simple centre of circulation—one of its infinitely many centres, in which his specificity as worker is extinguished.⁵

What this means is that, in order to complete the circle of its reproduction, capital has to pass through this critical point at which roles are inverted: ‘surplus value is realized in principle only by workers *in totality* buying back what they produce’.⁶ This point is crucial for Karatani: it provides the essential leverage from which to oppose the rule of capital today. Is it not natural that proletarians should focus their attack on that unique point at which they approach capital from the position of a buyer, and, consequently, at which it is capital that is forced to court them? ‘If workers can become subjects at all, it is only as consumers.’⁷ It is perhaps the ultimate case of the parallax situation: the position of worker-producer and that of consumer should be sustained as irreducible in their divergence, without privileging one as the ‘deeper truth’ of the other. (Did not the planned economy of state socialism pay a terrible price for the privilege it accorded production over consumption, and hence its failure to provide consumers with goods they needed, instead of products nobody wanted?)

This is one of Karatani’s key motifs: his rejection of the—if anything, proto-fascist—opposition between financial speculation and the ‘real’ economy of capitalists engaged in productive activity. For in capitalism, the production process is only a detour in the speculative process of money engendering more money. The logic of ‘profiteering’ is

⁵ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, Harmondsworth 1993, pp. 420–1.

⁶ TKM, p. 20.

⁷ TKM, p. 290.

ultimately also what sustains the incessant drive to revolutionize and expand production:

The majority of economists warn today that the speculation of global financial capital is detached from the 'substantial' economy. What they overlook, however, is that the substantial economy as such is also driven by illusion, and that such is the nature of the capitalist economy.⁸

There are, consequently, four basic positions *à propos* money: (1) the mercantilist belief—a naïvely direct fetishism—that money is a 'special thing'; (2) the 'classical bourgeois political economy' represented by Ricardo, which dismissed such fetishism as a mere illusion and perceived money as no more than a sign of the quantity of socially useful labour—conceiving value as inherent to a commodity; (3) the 'neoclassical' school which rejected not only the labour theory of value, but any 'substantial' notion of value—the price of a commodity becoming simply the result of the interplay between the supply and demand for it, or the utility of a commodity for other commodities. Karatani is right to emphasize how, paradoxically, Marx broke out of the confines of the 'classical' Ricardian labour theory of value through his reading of Bailey, the first 'vulgar' economist who emphasized the purely *relational* status of value—its expression of the way this commodity relates to all other commodities. It was Bailey who thus opened up the path towards the formal approach of Marx, which insists on the gap between an object and the structural place it occupies: in the same way that a king is a king not because of his inherent properties, but because people treat him as one (Marx's own example), a commodity is money because it occupies the formal place of the general equivalent of all commodities, not because say, gold, is 'naturally' money.

But it is crucial to take note of how both mercantilists and their Ricardian critics remained 'substantialist'. Ricardo was, of course, aware that the object which serves as money is not 'naturally' money, and laughed at the naïve superstition of money, dismissing mercantilists as primitive believers in magic properties. However, by reducing money to a secondary external sign of the value inherent in a commodity, he nonetheless again naturalized value, conceiving it as a direct 'substantial' property of a commodity. It was this illusion that generated the ingenuous early-Socialist and Proudhonian proposals to overcome money

⁸ TKM, p. 241.

fetishism by introducing a direct 'labour money' which would just designate the amount each individual contributed to social labour. Which is why, although Marx's *Darstellung* of the self-deployment of capital is full of Hegelian references, the self-movement of capital is far from the circular self-movement of the Hegelian Notion (or Spirit).⁹ The point of Marx is that this movement never catches up with itself, that it never recovers its credit, for its resolution is postponed forever, and crisis is its innermost constituent (the sign that the Whole of Capital is the non-True, as Adorno would have put it). In other words, its movement is a 'bad infinity', forever reproducing itself:

Notwithstanding the Hegelian descriptive style . . . *Capital* distinguishes itself from Hegel's philosophy in its motivation. The end of *Capital* is never the 'absolute Spirit'. *Capital* reveals the fact that capital, though organizing the world, can never go beyond its own limit. It is a Kantian critique of the ill-contained drive of capital/reason to self-realize beyond its limit.¹⁰

It is interesting to note that it was already Adorno, who in *Three Studies on Hegel*, critically characterized Hegel's system in the same 'financial' terms as a system which lives on credit that it can never pay off. The same 'financial' metaphor is often used for language itself. Brian Rotman, among others, has defined meaning as that which is always 'borrowed from the future', relying on its forever-postponed fulfilment-to-come.¹¹ For how do shared meanings emerge? Through what Alfred Schuetz called 'mutual idealization': the subject cuts the impasse of an endless probing into the question 'do we all mean the same thing by the term "bird"?' by simply presupposing and acting *as if* we do mean the same thing. There is no language without this 'leap of faith'. This presupposition, this 'leap of faith', should not be conceived in Habermasian vein as a normativity built into the functioning of language, the ideal all speakers (should) strive for. On the contrary, so far from being an ideal, it is a fiction that has to be undermined again and again if knowledge is to progress. So, if anything, this presupposed '*as if*' is profoundly anti-normative. A Habermasian would, of course, reply that the ideal, the norm inscribed into language, is nonetheless the state in which this fiction would no longer be a fiction, but smooth communication in which subjects would reach a frictionless agreement. But such a defence

⁹ See, among others, Helmut Reichelt, *Zur logischen Struktur des Kapitalbegriffs*, Frankfurt 1969.

¹⁰ TCM, p. 9.

¹¹ See Brian Rotman, *Signifying Nothing: the Semiotics of Zero*, London 1975.

misses the point, which is not only and simply that such a state is inaccessible (and also undesirable), but that the ‘leap of faith’ not only has no normative content, but can even block further elaboration—why strive for something that we allegedly already have? In other words, what the reading of this ‘as if’ as normativity fails to grasp is that the ‘leap of faith’ is necessary and productive (enabling communication) precisely insofar as it is a counterfactual fiction. Its ‘truth effect’, its positive role of enabling communication, hinges precisely on the fact that it is *not* true, that it jumps ahead into fiction—its status is not normative because it cuts the debilitating deadlock of language, its ultimate lack of guarantee, by way of *presenting what we should strive for as already accomplished*.

The same logic of living on credit borrowed from the future also goes for Stalinism. The standard evolutionary version is that, while Stalinist socialism did play a certain role in enabling the rapid industrialization of Russia, by the mid-60s the system had exhausted its potential. However, what this judgement fails to take into account is that the entire epoch of Soviet Communism from 1917—or more precisely from Stalin’s proclamation of the goal of ‘building socialism in one country’ in 1924 onwards—lived on borrowed time, was ‘indebted to its own future’, so that the final failure retroactively disqualified the earlier epochs themselves.

Economy and politics

Is, however, the ultimate Marxian parallax not that between economy and politics—between the ‘critique of political economy’ with its logic of commodities, and the political struggle with its logic of class antagonisms? Both logics are ‘transcendental’, not merely ontico-empirical; and each is irreducible to the other. Of course they point towards each other—class struggle is inscribed into the very heart of economy, yet it has to remain absent, non-thematized (recall how the manuscript of *Capital* III abruptly breaks off with classes). But this very mutual implication is twisted so that it prevents any direct contact between them. Any direct translation of political struggle into a mere mirroring of economic ‘interests’ is doomed to fail, just as is any reduction of the economic sphere into a secondary ‘reified’ sedimentation of an underlying founding political process.

In this sense, the ‘pure politics’ of Badiou, Rancière or Balibar, more Jacobin than Marxist, shares with its great opponent, Anglo-Saxon Cultural Studies, a degradation of the sphere of economy. That is to say, what all the new French (or French-oriented) theories of the Political, from Balibar through Rancière and Badiou to Laclau and Mouffe, aim at is—to put it in the traditional philosophical terms—the reduction of the sphere of economy (of material production) to an ‘ontic’ sphere deprived of ‘ontological’ dignity. Within this horizon, there is simply no place for the Marxian ‘critique of political economy’: the structure of the universe of commodities and capital in Marx’s *Capital* is *not* just that of a limited empirical sphere, but a kind of socio-transcendental *a priori*, the matrix which generates the totality of social and political relations. The relationship between economy and politics is ultimately that of the well-known visual paradox of the ‘two faces or a vase’: one either sees the two faces or a vase, never both of them—one has to make a choice. In the same way, we can either focus on the political, reducing the domain of the economy to the empirical ‘servicing of goods’, or on the economic, reducing politics to a theatre of appearances, a passing phenomenon that will vanish with the arrival of a developed communist (or technocratic) society, in which, as Saint-Simon and Engels put it, the ‘administration of people’ gives way to the ‘administration of things’.

The ‘political’ critique of Marxism—the claim that, when one reduces politics to a ‘formal’ expression of some underlying ‘objective’ socio-economic process, one loses the openness and contingency constitutive of the political field proper—should thus be supplemented by its obverse: the field of economy is *in its very form* irreducible to politics. It is this reality, of the economic as the determining *form* of the social, that French ‘political post-Marxists’ miss when they reduce the economy to one of the positive social spheres.

The basic idea of the parallax view is thus that bracketing itself produces its object. ‘Democracy’ as a form emerges only when one brackets the texture of economic relations as well as the inherent logic of the political state apparatus—both have to be abstracted, for people who are effectively embedded in economic processes and subjected to state apparatuses to be reduced to individual electoral agents. The same goes also for the ‘logic of domination’, of the way people are controlled or manipulated by the apparatuses of subjection: in order to discern these mechanisms of power, one has to abstract not only from the democratic

imaginary (as Foucault does in his analyses of the micro-physics of power, and Lacan in his analysis of power in ‘Seminar XVIII’), but also from the process of economic (re)production. Finally, the sphere of economic (re)production, too, only emerges if one methodologically brackets the concrete existence of state and political ideology; it is no surprise that so many critics of Marx have complained that his ‘critique of political economy’ lacks a theory of power and the state. The trap to be avoided here, of course, is the naïve idea that one should keep in view the social totality, of which democratic ideology, the exercise of power and the process of economic (re)production are merely parts. If one tries to keep all these in view simultaneously, one ends up seeing nothing—their contours disappear. This bracketing is not a mere epistemological procedure, it answers to what Marx called ‘real abstraction’—an abstraction from power and economic relations that is inscribed into the very actuality of the democratic process, and so on.

Philosophy and homelessness

More radically still, should we not assert the parallax status of philosophy as such? From its very beginning with the Ionian Presocratics, philosophy emerged in the interstices of substantial social communities, as the thought of those who were caught in a ‘parallax’ position, unable fully to identify with any positive social identities. This is what is missing in Heidegger’s account: how, from his beloved Presocratics onwards, philosophizing has involved an ‘impossible’ position of displacement from any communal identity, be it in the ‘economy’, as the organization of the household, or the *polis*. Like exchange according to Marx, philosophy emerges in the interstices *between* different communities, in a fragile space of circulation which lacks any positive identity. Is this not especially clear in the case of Descartes? The grounding experience of his manifesto of universal doubt is precisely the ‘multicultural’ revelation that one’s own tradition is no better than what appear to us the ‘eccentric’ traditions of others:

I had been taught, even in my College days, that there is nothing imaginable so strange or so little credible that it has not been maintained by one philosopher or other, and I further recognized in the course of my travels that all those whose sentiments are very contrary to ours are yet not necessarily barbarians or savages, but may be possessed of reason in as great or even a greater degree than ourselves. I also considered how very different the self-same man, identical in mind and spirit, may become, according as

he is brought up from childhood amongst the French or Germans, or has passed his whole life amongst Chinese or cannibals. I likewise noticed how even in the fashions of one's clothing the same thing that pleased us ten years ago, and which will perhaps please us once again before ten years are passed, seems at the present time extravagant and ridiculous. I thus concluded that it is much more custom and example that persuade us than any certain knowledge, and yet in spite of this the voice of the majority does not afford a proof of any value in truths a little difficult to discover, because such truths are much more likely to have been discovered by one man than by a nation. I could not, however, put my finger on a single person whose opinions seemed preferable to those of others, and I found that I was, so to speak, constrained myself to undertake the direction of my procedure.¹²

Karatani is thus justified in emphasizing the insubstantial character of the *cogito*: 'It cannot be spoken of positively; no sooner than it is, its function is lost'.¹³ The *cogito* is not a substantial entity, but a pure structural function, an empty place (Lacan: \$)—which as such can only emerge in the interstices of substantial communal systems. There is thus an intrinsic link between the emergence of the *cogito* and the disintegration and loss of substantive communal identities, which holds even more for Spinoza than for Descartes. Although Spinoza criticized the Cartesian *cogito* as a positive ontological entity, he implicitly endorsed it as the 'position of the enunciated', of a radical self-doubt, since even more than Descartes, Spinoza spoke from an interstitial social space, as neither a Jew nor a Christian.

It would be easy to reply that this Cartesian multiculturalist opening and relativizing of one's own position is just a first step, the abandoning of inherited opinions, on the road to arrival at absolutely certain philosophic knowledge—the abandoning of the false shaky home in order to reach our true home. Did not Hegel himself compare Descartes's discovery of the *cogito* to a sailor who, after long drifting on the sea, finally catches sight of firm ground? Is Cartesian homelessness thus not just a deceptive tactical move—a precursive 'negation of negation', the *Aufhebung* of the false traditional home in the finally discovered conceptual true home? Was in this sense Heidegger not justified in his approving quotation of Novalis's definition of philosophy as a longing for the true lost home? We may be allowed to doubt it. After all, Kant himself stands as contrary witness: in his transcendental philosophy, homelessness remains irreducible—we remain forever split, condemned

¹² *Discourse on Method*, Notre Dame, 1994, p. 33.

¹³ TKM, p. 134.

to a fragile position between the two dimensions and to a 'leap of faith' without any guarantee. Even with Hegel, are matters really so clear? Is it not that, for Hegel, this new 'home' is in a way *homelessness itself*, the very open movement of negativity?

Along these lines of the constitutive 'homelessness' of philosophy, Karatani asserts—against Hegel—Kant's idea of a cosmopolitan 'world-civil-society' [*Welthburgergesellschaft*], which would not be a simple expansion of citizenship within a nation-state to citizenship of a global transnational state. For Karatani it involves a shift from identification with one's 'organic' ethnic substance, actualized in a particular cultural tradition, to a radically different principle of identification—he refers to Deleuze's notion of a 'universal singularity' as opposed to the triad of individuality—particularity—generality. This opposition is the contrast between Kant and Hegel. For Hegel, 'world-civil-society' is an abstract notion without substantial content, lacking the mediation of the particular and thus the force of full actuality. For the only way an individual can participate effectively in universal humanity is via full identification with a particular nation-state—I am 'human' only as a German, an Englishman, a Frenchman, and so on.

For Kant, on the contrary, 'world-civil-society' designates the paradox of a universal singularity—that is, of a singular subject who, in a kind of short-circuit, bypasses the mediation of the particular to participate directly in the universal. This identification with the universal is not an identification with an encompassing global substance ('humanity'), but with a universal ethico-political principle—a universal religious collective, a scientific collective, a global revolutionary organization, all of which are in principle accessible to everyone. Just this, as Karatani points out, is what Kant meant, in a famous passage of 'What is Enlightenment?', by 'public' as opposed to 'private'. For him what was 'private' was not the individual as opposed to the community, but the very communal-institutional order of one's particular identification, while what was 'public' was the transnational universality of the exercise of one's reason. The paradox is thus that one participates in the universal dimension of the 'public' sphere precisely as a singular individual, extracted from or even opposed to one's substantive communal identification—one is truly universal only as radically singular, in the interstices of communal identities.

This, however, brings us to our first critical remark. Does Karatani really 'give Hegel a chance', or does he transform Hegel into a convenient straw man (as is often the case with critics of Hegel)? A negative proof of this insufficiency is a feature of Karatani's book which cannot but strike the eye: the conspicuous absence of any reference to Alfred Sohn-Rethel, who also directly deployed the parallel between Kant's transcendental critique and Marx's critique of political economy, but in the opposite critical direction (the structure of the commodity universe is that of the Kantian transcendental space).¹⁴ Karatani can only rely uncritically on Kant if he ignores the demonstration that Kant's logic itself is already 'contaminated' by the structure of commodity fetishism, and that it is only Hegel's dialectic which provides the tools to break out of the antinomies of the universe of commodities.

Lotteries of power

Furthermore, some of the details of Karatani's reading of Kant are questionable. When Karatani proposes his 'transcendental' solution to the antinomy of money—we need an *x* which will be money and not-money—and then reapplies this solution to power—we need some centralized power, but not fetishized into a substance which is 'in itself' power—he explicitly evokes a structural homology with Duchamp, where an object becomes art not because of its inherent properties, but simply by occupying a certain place in the aesthetic system. But does not all this exactly fit Claude Lefort's theorization of democracy as a political order in which the place of power is originally empty, and is only temporarily filled in by elected representatives? Along these lines, even Karatani's apparently eccentric notion of combining elections with lotteries in the procedure of determining who will rule us is more traditional than it may appear. He himself mentions examples from Ancient Greece, but his proposal paradoxically fulfils the same task as Hegel's theory of monarchy.

At this juncture Karatani takes the heroic risk of a crazy-sounding definition of the difference between the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and the dictatorship of the proletariat: 'If universal suffrage by secret ballot, namely, parliamentary democracy, is the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, the introduction of a lottery should be deemed the dictatorship of the

¹⁴ Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: a Critique of Epistemology*, London 1978.

proletariat'.¹⁵ In this way, '*the centre exists and does not exist at the same time*'.¹⁶: it exists as an empty place, a transcendental *x*, and it does not exist as a substantial positive entity. But would this really be enough to undermine the 'fetishism of power'? A contingent individual is allowed to occupy the place of power temporarily, and the charisma of power briefly bestowed on him, following the well-known logic of fetishist disavowal: 'I know very well that this is an ordinary person like me, *but nonetheless* . . . (while in power, he becomes an instrument of a transcendent force, power speaks and acts *through* him)'. Consequently, would not the true task be precisely to get rid of the very mystique of the *place* of power, in keeping with the general matrix of Kant's solutions, where metaphysical propositions (God, immortality of the soul, etc) are asserted 'under erasure', as postulates?

Lastly, Karatani's account of Marx's notions of surplus-value and of exploitation has a strange lacuna: it completely ignores the key element in his critique of the standard labour theory of value. For Marx, workers are not exploited by being denied the full value of their work—their wages are in principle 'just', they are paid the entire value of the commodity they are selling, their labour power. Rather they are exploited because the use-value of this commodity is unique—for it produces new value greater than its own value, and it is this surplus that is appropriated by the capitalists. Karatani, on the contrary, reduces exploitation to just another case of a difference in price between value systems: because of incessant technological innovation, capitalists can earn from selling the products of labour more than they have to pay their workers. Here capitalist exploitation is posited as structurally similar to the activity of merchants who buy

¹⁵ TKM, p. 183. Karatani invokes the practice of sortition in Athenian democracy. But is not the combination of balloting and drawing by lots that he advocates close to the oligarchic procedure for electing the Doge in Venice, established in 1268, after an incumbent tried to obtain hereditary monarchic powers? There was first a vote for 30 members of a council, then another to select 9 of them. These 9 then nominated 40 provisional electors who in turn chose 12 by lot who then elected 25. These were reduced to 9, who then each nominated 5. The 45 so nominated were reduced by casting lots to 11; 9 of the 11 votes were needed to choose the final 41 who, meeting in conclave, would elect the Doge. The aim of this labyrinthine procedure was, of course, to prevent any group or family from exercising undue influence on the outcome. Furthermore, in order to prevent the Doge himself from getting too much power, there was a list of duties he could not undertake (his sons or daughters could not marry outside the Republic, he was only allowed to open official letters in the presence of others, etc.).

¹⁶ TKM, p. 183.

and sell at different locations, exploiting the fact that the same product is cheaper here (where they buy it) than there (where they sell it):

Only where there is a difference in price between value systems: A (when they sell their labour power) and B (when they buy the commodities), is surplus value realized. This is so-called relative surplus value. And this is attained only by incessant technological innovation. Hence one finds that industrial capital too earns surplus value from the interstice between two different systems.¹⁷

Karatani ends by recommending the experiment of LETS (a Local Exchange Trading System based on a non-marketed currency) as an economic model of 'counteraction' to capital. But it is difficult to see how this avoids the very trap to which Karatani otherwise points—the trap of a medium of exchange that would no longer be a fetish, but would serve just as a 'labour-money', a transparent instrument designating each individual's contribution to the social product. Yet, however weak it may seem at these joints, Karatani's book is a must for everyone who wants to break the deadlock of 'cultural' resistance to capitalism, and reassert the actuality of Marx's critique of political economy. The objective irony of Karatani's theory is that it can also be read as an allegory of the parallax split that has determined his own subjective position: he is geographically split between Osaka and the world of the East Coast US academia where he is now employed; his writing is split between literary-cultural analyses and engaged socio-political work; this work itself is yet again split between a 'deconstructionist' reading of Marxian political economy and a practical engagement in the New Associationist Movement in Japan. Far from signalling a critical failure, this parallax position of Karatani serves as the index of truth: in today's globalized universe, marked by irreconcilable gaps between different levels of our life, such a fidelity to parallax views, to unresolved antagonisms, is the only way to approach the totality of our experience.

¹⁷ TKM, p. 239.

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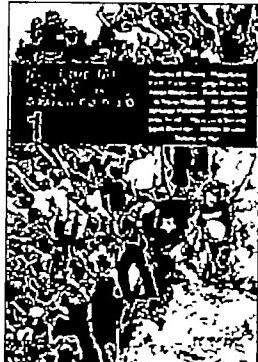
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BOITEMPO

EDITORIAL



MARGEM ESQUERDA N.1

(Left Margin No. 1)

This first issue contains a *Dossier* on war, with articles by Immanuel Wallerstein, Ricardo Antunes, Jorge Bernstein; *Perspectives on Lula's Government*, by Michael Lowy, José Luiz Fiori, Jacob Gorender and others; *Articles*: texts by Perry Anderson, István Mészáros and Jesus Ranieri, *Reviews* on the left in Brazil and the historical dimensions of human rights

Contact: margemesquerda@boitempo.com

REVIEWS

Peter Bürger, *Ursprung des postmodernen Denkens*
Velbrück Wissenschaft: Weilerswist 2000, €9.90, paperback
190 pp, 3 934730 10 8

PETER DEWS

RESITUATING THE POSTMODERN?

In his sombre essay of 1915, 'Thoughts for the Times on War and Death', Freud begins by evoking the cultural ambience of the *belle époque*. For the educated European of the time, Freud claims, the pre-eminent artists and thinkers of the continent had contributed to a 'common civilization', unsegmented by political or linguistic barriers:

None of these great men had seemed . . . foreign because they spoke another language—neither the incomparable explorer of human passions, nor the intoxicated worshipper of beauty, nor the powerful and menacing prophet, nor the subtle satirist, and he never reproached himself on that account for being a renegade towards his own nation and his beloved mother-tongue.

But with dismaying speed this sense of a shared cultural heritage had disintegrated amidst the manipulative propaganda, raw animosity and unparalleled destruction of the First World War, a conflict which, according to Freud, 'threatens to leave a legacy of embitterment that will make any renewal of those bonds impossible for a long time to come.'

It is both the strength and weakness of Peter Bürger's book on the origins of postmodern thought that it takes this moment of civilizational collapse, so poignantly recorded by the first psychoanalyst, as its starting point. Strength, because Bürger—best known in the anglophone world for his 1974 *Theory of the Avant-Garde*—provides a lineage of postmodernism which

reaches back far beyond the political disillusionment of the 68 generation, or the economic shift towards neoliberalism and post-Fordism, which critics on the Left have often seen as the source of the postmodern *Stimmung*. Weakness, because, despite his title, Bürger offers no real explanation of why 'postmodernism' and 'postmodernity' should have become the ubiquitous buzz words of cultural analysis in the final quarter of the twentieth century. Rightly sceptical of hyperbole about an epochal transition, Bürger regards postmodernism as essentially the latest expression of an oppositional stance internal to modernity. But, in consequence, he displays little interest in the social and cultural transformations which gave the tropes of postmodernism such global resonance. Indeed, his real interest is in the genealogy of French post-structuralist thought—and it is only in so far as the Parisian philosophy of the 1960s and 70s can be regarded as the intellectual powerhouse of recent cultural theory that his account has any real purchase on the question of the postmodern.

Yet within these confines, Bürger's book does have original things to say. His lineage of French post-structuralism leads back to the mire and massacre of World War One, and the 'crisis in the self-understanding of modernity' that the slaughter provoked, by a double route, one more direct than the other. The first trail runs via the anarchic subversions of Dada—its founding manifesto published in Zurich by Tristan Tzara the year after Freud's essay—and then via the Dadaist impulses that fed into French Surrealism. The second passes through the young Heidegger's response to the turbulence of the interwar world, and the impact of his account of authentic being-in-the-world on the French Hegel renaissance of the 1930s. The vivid existentialist slogans of Alexandre Kojève's reinvention of Hegel, in his lectures on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, would have been unthinkable, Bürger contends, without the example of *Sein und Zeit*. 'Man', Kojève declares, giving Heidegger's notion of 'being-towards-death' an exacerbating twist, is 'death living a human life.'

These lines of influence may appear implausibly convoluted. But it is Bürger's contention that they come together in the thought of those French writers of the 1930s who were to attain iconic status for the intellectual avant-garde of the sixties. Both Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot are, in their contrasting ways, responding to the collision of Hegel, Heidegger and Surrealism. More specifically, Bürger proposes that postmodern thought springs from the effort of these writers of the thirties to throw grit in the cogs of Hegel's dialectic of recognition. Hegel's philosophy represents for them the most profound attempt to think history as a developmental process, a collective human project in which civilization is progressively built not by the master, but through the imposed self-restraint and delayed

gratification of the labour of the bondsman. It is Kojève who formulates the point with his typical aphoristic concision:

Lordship is an existential dead-end. The lord can either become *stupefied* through pleasure, or *die* as lord on the battlefield, but he cannot live consciously, and thus know himself as satisfied by what he is... Understanding, abstract thought, science, technology, the arts—all this has its origin in the forced labour of the bondsman.

But once the opposition is formulated in these stark—not to say, somewhat simplistic—terms, the question of which standpoint is to be preferred becomes irresistible. And the reply of Georges Bataille and his fellow-thinkers is well known: sovereignty, ecstasy, expenditure without reserve, is ultimately preferable to the position of the bondsman, and the remorseless rationality of the world he is forced to construct. In his essay 'Hegel, Death and Sacrifice' Bataille wrote:

Man's intelligence, his *discursive thought*, developed as functions of servile labour. Only sacred, poetic words, limited to the level of impotent beauty, have retained the power to manifest full sovereignty... To the extent that discourse informs it, what is *sovereign* is given in terms of *servitude*.

No wonder Kojève, whose thought always pointed, in due Hegelian fashion, towards the moment of universal reconciliation, the mutual recognition of master and slave, resisted Bataille's blandishments, labelling him the 'sorcerer's apprentice'.

Despite the immense differences in politics and tone, Maurice Blanchot's early work plays a similar cat-and-mouse game with Hegel. His famous essay 'Literature and the Right to Death' is, in fact, an extended debate with the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Ingeniously, Blanchot focuses not on the master-slave dialectic, but on Hegel's treatment of the early modern cult of sincerity, in the section called the 'Spiritual Animal Kingdom'. The paradox of an 'authenticity' which dissipates as soon as it is externalized in the work, and thus surrendered to the vagaries of public interpretation, gives Blanchot his model for the dilemma of the writer. Literature, Blanchot asserts, is 'foreign to any true culture, because culture is the work of a person changing himself little by little over a period of time, and not the immediate enjoyment of a fictional transformation which dispenses with both work and time.' Indeed, Blanchot provocatively implies the affinity of literature and Revolutionary Terror—that metaphysical short-circuit, analysed by Hegel, in which the complex institutional mediations of freedom are erased in a self-destructive frenzy of negativity.

Historically, Bürger's claim for the influence of Bataille and Blanchot on the leading figures of post-structuralism can scarcely be denied. Derrida

published a landmark essay on Bataille in his first collection, *Writing and Difference*, and has grappled with Blanchot throughout his career (tellingly, a short essay by Blanchot is about the only secondary text on Marx which Derrida finds worth considering in *Spectres of Marx*). Foucault's theory of the displacement of transcendental subjectivity by language, which reaches its paroxysm at the end of *The Order of Things*, is largely inspired by the same thinker. And, thanks to his biographers, we now know that his interest in transgression, like that of Bataille, was far from being merely theoretical. In his 1970 preface to the first volume of the *Œuvres complètes*, Foucault declared grandly: '*nous devons à Bataille une large part du moment où nous sommes*'.

In the case of Jacques Lacan, of course—the third prominent thinker of the sixties to whom Bürger devotes attention—it is not even a question of influence. A friend and associate of the Surrealists, who published some of his earliest work in the journal *Minotaure*, Lacan was shaped by the same milieu in which Bataille's and Blanchot's thinking was also formed. Indeed, he enjoyed what his biographer Elisabeth Roudinesco terms a 'subterranean friendship' with Bataille, a friendship which, predictably perhaps, revolved around a kind of sexual pact: the writer's wife, Sylvia, became Lacan's lover, and ultimately his second spouse. More unusual was the fact that Lacan appeared to be more influenced than influencing, his theories of desire, perversion and sublimation revealing a debt to the slightly older man. Arguably, Lacan was also Kojève's most creative inheritor, using the insights of the *Phenomenology* to produce a pioneering account of the intersubjective dynamics of the analytic process.

But plausible as Burger's account may be as the genealogy of an important strand in post-structuralist thought, it leaves one large historical question unanswered. The history of Surrealism is inseparable from the political turbulence of the 1930s. Burger vividly evokes the atmosphere of the time: the aftermath of the Depression, the ominous rise of Nazi Germany, disillusion with the ineffectual parliamentarianism of the Third Republic, anticipations of violent social transformation. In 1935 André Breton and Georges Bataille, sinking their differences, were among the founders of *Contre-Attaque*, a grouping of far-left intellectuals formed to counter the intensifying threat of fascism in France. The rhetoric of the group was often brutal and apocalyptic, and—in the case of certain texts composed by Bataille alone—suggested a celebration of violence beyond any political utility. Indeed, in the draft of a letter to Kojève, Bataille frankly admitted, 'I do not attribute much importance to the difference between communism and fascism.' A comparable mood, if more sinuously expressed, is exemplified by some of Blanchot's writings of the thirties. Only a regime of terror, Blanchot argued in an essay for the Maurrasian journal *Combat*,

foreshadowing his later reflections on the affinity of writing and political violence, can drag France out of its 'unreality'.

The question, then, is why such apocalyptic gestures should have renewed their appeal in the early 1960s? After all, this was the height of the postwar economic boom, when Gaullism seemed firmly, even stiflingly, established in power, in contrast with the instabilities of the Third and Fourth Republics, and the French were beginning to enjoy an unprecedented—if unequally distributed—consumerist prosperity. But simply to pose this question is almost sufficient to provide the answer. It is true that, in one sense, post-structuralism tries to render the moment of negativity autonomous, to detach it from its Hegelian role as the motor of a progressive movement of conscious self-determination. In the early Foucault this negativity takes the form of 'unreason'—later it becomes the *plebs*, or 'the body and its pleasures'; in Derrida its most famous name is, of course, '*différance*'. But this focus on the heterogeneous, the blind spot, the inassimilable margin, is only half the story. For what is equally typical of post-structuralism is a sense of the ineluctability of the system, the inevitability of closure. The utopian, revolutionary horizon that Surrealism was still able to hold open, given its historical moment, has given way to a profound ambivalence. In his 'Reflections on Surrealism' Blanchot wrote:

That rational constructions are rejected, that universal significations vanish, is to say that language does not have to serve to express something, that it is free, freedom itself. When surrealists speak of "freeing" words, of treating them other than as little servants, it is a veritable social demand they have in view

By contrast, while they may have shared the rejection of rationality and universality, the thinkers of the sixties were simply embarrassed by the concept of freedom. To its traditional metaphysical contrary, necessity, they preferred to counterpose its poor relations—contingency, hazard and chance.

The ambiguity is already displayed clearly in Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*. In this book, Foucault tells two narratives simultaneously. Inspired by the French tradition of historical epistemology, especially the work of Bachelard and Canguilhem, he stresses the role of discourses and practices in the constitution of objects of scientific investigation. 'Madness' is the distinctive object made possible by the modern asylum, and the moralized psychiatric practices that it framed. At the same time, different epochs are characterized by qualitatively distinct experiences of the other of reason, incommensurable models of disruption, so that no comparative judgements can be made: we have only a series of discontinuous paradigms. Yet Foucault also tells a narrative of decline, in which the communication and exchange between reason and unreason that was still possible in the Renaissance

gradually gives way to the unilateral categorizations of modern clinical psychology. The elegiac overtones of the book are unmistakable.

It was typical of Foucault's intellectual itinerary, however, that he did not seek to sustain this ambiguity. Rather, his subsequent work can be seen as a series of lurches—first towards the elimination of the pre-discursive altogether, in *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* ('There is no heaven which glitters through the grid of all astronomies'), then towards the emergence of the mute 'body' as the target of operations of power and discourse, and finally towards the reinstatement of a notion of freedom as pure self-constitution and self-creation, in his final writings on an 'aesthetics of existence'. In Derrida's case, a similar ambiguity is not played out historically, in a series of experimentally adopted positions, but rather is built into the fundamental posture of his philosophy. Deconstruction operates on the borderline, neither content to remain within what is characterized as 'logocentrism', nor convinced of the possibility of escaping it, internally disrupting the repressive structures of rationality, but not in a way which might lead to any definitive supersession of them.

Bürger regards the work of both Foucault and Derrida as culminating in an impasse, and a plausible case can be made for this view. But it is debatable whether he formulates the deadlock correctly. In Foucault, Bürger suggests, it is the concept of discourse that sustains the ambivalence: discourse being, on the one hand, the system of rules which determines what can and cannot be said, and on the other 'the locus of the free unfolding of language'. But it is doubtful that Foucault ever thought of discourse in terms of such a burgeoning. Even in the last phase of his thought, which turns around the notion of problematization, discourse defines historically the terms in which subjective self-constitution can occur, rather than itself being an expression of the subject's freedom. The essential ambiguity of Foucault's work, I would suggest, turns rather on the status of the pre-discursive: is it a mirage generated by language, or is it the indefinite contour of a reality which appeals, however mutely, for articulation? At the end of his life, Foucault moved towards a curiously Sartrean resolution: there is no positive field of the pre-discursive, no human nature to be emancipated, but there is the elusive indeterminacy of freedom as such.

In the case of Derrida, Bürger's claim is that any philosophical attempt to go beyond the essentially servile subject of labour and rational projection must have recourse to a different, more distant origin, one which situates self-conscious subjectivity as an effect or derivate. The fact that Derrida describes this ultimate, trans-subjective source as a 'non-origin', or as 'non-present' does nothing, Burger rightly claims, to alter the fundamental structure of his thinking. Indeed, as he points out, it is the very non-presentability and non-locatability of *differance* which might lead one

to think of it as an 'origin' in the most fundamental sense. Like the grace of God in Christian theology, *difference* is a 'primordial happening' (*Ursprungsgeschehen*) which is everywhere, and hence nowhere. Here the problem is not so much that Bürger has misrepresented the basic tension of Derrida's position. Rather, what is strange, in view of the recent date of Bürger's book, is his neglect of the extent to which Derrida himself has moved towards the notion of a non-present, non-objectifiable source—now reconfigured as the transcendent futural point of ethical orientation, as justice or the messianic.

Post-structuralism, as we have seen, rejected the visions of human emancipation that drove the original Surrealist fusion of the aesthetic and the political. And, even if one compares the post-structuralists with Bürger's key forefathers, Bataille and Blanchot, whose relation to Surrealism was oblique, if not antagonistic, it is clear that the pathos of their treatments of subjectivity is lacking. An unbridgeable gulf yawns between Bataille's tormented, quasi-mystical explorations of *l'expérience intérieure* and the young Derrida's blank assertion that there is 'no such thing as experience', just as it does between Blanchot's reflections on the death-like eclipse of the subject of writing, and Foucault's brusque reduction of the author to a function of discourse in his famous lecture on the topic from the late sixties.

Bürger does not discuss the events of May 68, and this is scarcely surprising, since they do not exactly support his case. The Surrealist impulse erupted again on the streets of Paris, with slogans to match. But where were the doyens of avant-garde French thought? Foucault was away teaching in Tunisia, where his partner, the sociologist Daniel Defert, was fulfilling his volunteer service requirements. Besides, his thought was regarded with suspicion as being structuralist and technocratic, even Gaullist, by the rebellious students. Derrida was sympathetic to the PCF during the sixties (he broke with the *Tel Quel* group when they plunged into the *chinoiserie* of their post-68 'Maoist' phase). His celebrated lecture on 'The Ends of Man', delivered in New York in October 1968, hardly chimed with Marxist-humanist protests against a reified, bureaucratized society. It announced instead, with an apocalyptic *frisson* and gestures towards the global ferment, the demise of all philosophical anthropology, all notions of the humanly appropriate.

Consideration of *les événements* also brings into focus the distinctive position of Lacan, the third of Bürger's progenitors of the postmodern. For in some respects, Lacan fits into Bürger's narrative more neatly than any of the other thinkers he treats, his work forming a direct connexion between the avant-garde milieu of the thirties and that of the sixties. His friendship with the Surrealists and debt to Kojève have been noted. Yet Lacan had little understanding of the May rebellion, despite the odd expression of sympathy, intended rather to provoke his own followers. When Danny Cohn-Bendit

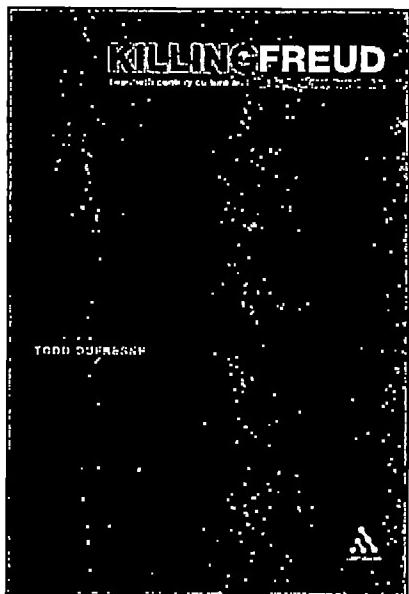
and some of his comrades were summoned to explain the movement to him, the discussion collapsed in desultory incomprehension. In December 68 Lacan famously declared to the assembled students at Vincennes, 'As revolutionaries, what you long for is a master. You'll get one'. He was vexed, even jealous, when some of his best pupils turned towards Maoism—he, after all, was the great helmsman.

At the same time, it is arguable that Lacan has been seriously mis-categorized as a 'postmodernist'. He was certainly out of sympathy with the pluralism, culturalism and relativism that have been hallmarks of the postmodern internationally. In Lacan we find a rethinking of the relation of subjectivity and truth, and not an attempt to dissolve this nexus, or its constituents. Nietzscheanism, after a brief episode of youthful enthusiasm, held no appeal for him, with its implication that we have to choose *between meaning and truth*. If meaning has been drained from the desiccated, symbolically impoverished lifeworlds of contemporary society, it has nonetheless found refuge in our dreams and symptoms, in the discourse of the Other, of the 'true subject of the unconscious'. Hence the thinker who most closely matches Bürger's model in relaying the impulses of the thirties is the one whose thought, in its fundamental outlines, bears least relation to the constellation of attitudes typically labelled as postmodern. It is no accident that contemporary French thinkers such as Alain Badiou, who make a point of their dismissal of postmodernism, are those who draw their primary inspiration from Lacan.

In short, Bürger has an idiosyncratic take on the postmodern, to say the least, equating it more or less entirely with Bataille's notion of *négativité sans emploi*, the protest of a powerless sovereignty against our thoroughly functionalized world and its catastrophic consequences. Yet even if we accept this definition, if we acknowledge that singularity and negativity cannot simply be absorbed in some reconfigured narrative of progress, we are still faced with the problem of evaluation. Bürger's admiration for Surrealism and its offshoots, for their disruptive exuberance and dangerous excess, radiates from the book. Surrealism has taught us a vital lesson, that 'the substantial content of the unity of modernity is diremption . . . The rift is not to be closed, since it defines modernity.' Yet, in the end, Burger seems ingenuous in his tendency to transfer this admiration to the postmodern, almost without qualification. In his conclusion he writes: 'Postmodern thought holds on to an epochal experience. It draws from despair the power to devise a form of thought that no longer relies on the securities of the dialectic.' But, unfortunately, this verdict downplays the extent to which postmodernism, as a broader cultural phenomenon, suggests an anaesthesia that no longer allows for anything as salutary as despair.

Of course, if the essence of play is chance and spontaneity, then Surrealism was characterized by a profound playfulness. But somehow the willed inauthenticity, the self-undercutting and suspicion of seriousness in much contemporary thought is something different. There is perhaps no clearer indication of this gulf than the curious way in which the term 'Theory', as used in the anglophone Cultural Studies milieu, has become what might be called an 'intransitive noun'. No longer an effort at the systematic comprehension of anything, 'Theory' has become a largely self-referential structure—and one whose ostentatious deployment appears far more important than the phenomena whose disclosure it might once have been assumed to serve.

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Michael Moore, *A World Without Walls: Freedom, Development, Free Trade and Global Governance*

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ROBERT WADE

THE RINGMASTER OF DOHA

First Seattle, now Cancún: how should we understand the current crisis of the wto? According to the *Economist*, poor countries have been the losers in the latest breakdown of global trade-policy talks: the agenda agreed at Doha in November 2001, and due to be taken forward at Cancún, was centred on development. The us was far from unhappy to see the negotiations collapse and has been energetically pursuing its own bilateral and regional trade agenda instead. On this view, the wto's failure to advance towards further multilateral agreements points not only to a fracturing of the global trading system but to the likelihood of increased domestic pressures for American protectionism. An alternative perspective would see the emergence of the g20 caucus at Cancún and its refusal to kowtow to the us–eu interpretation of Doha as an opportunity for a decisive shift in the balance of power in world-trade relations—though only if developing countries continue to pull together.

The fixer—if not the architect—of the Doha Declaration was the then Director-General of the wto, Michael Moore. Shoe-horned into the post in September 1999, just weeks before the debacle at Seattle, Moore's key tasks were, firstly, to pull together a fresh consensus on global trade policies, binding on its members. And secondly, to oversee the accession of several new states; crucially, China. This account of his three-year sojourn at the wto—though blustery and often evasive—nevertheless provides some useful, if inadvertent, insights into the actual operations of power and hegemony within the world's youngest multinational institution, and its advantages and drawbacks for global capital.

Since the 1980s, public policy in the West has been increasingly correlated around the core neoliberal agenda—deregulation, privatization,

flexibilization—although not the elimination of agricultural subsidies or lifting of restrictions on the cross-border movement of labour. Not only Reagan, Thatcher and their successors in the US and UK, but Centre-Left parties and governments across Europe, Japan and Australasia have coalesced around the same programme. To a remarkable degree, any policy that might constrain the freedom of international capital has been delegitimized in the name of an imperative of global competitiveness and efficiency—a Gestalt shift from a multi-dimensional model, in which loyalty, stability and protection against systemic instability were given relative priority, to a more uni-dimensional one that celebrates exit, competition and the opportunity to profit from risk as guiding principles. Institutional, Keynesian and development economics—previously flourishing approaches—have been pushed to the margins by the new doctrine, which is presented as a universal science of human behaviour; resting upon the epistemological assumption that, in the words of Clinton's Treasury Secretary, Larry Summers, 'the laws of economics are like the laws of engineering. There is only one set of laws and they work everywhere'. The common good can thus best be advanced by the global implementation of these laws, and developing countries legitimately pressed into agreements that intrude deep into their domestic arrangements, confining their policy choices to free-market ones.

This normative consensus has been internationalized largely through multinational economic organizations such as the IMF, World Bank and WTO. These essentially political institutions are operated as a condominium by a small number of prosperous states—the US pre-eminent among them—with the aim, not of conquering other countries in order to extract tribute, but of establishing rules and procedures to reinforce their own economic, political, cultural and military predominance. Over the past decades the MEOs have increasingly redefined their agendas towards the deep restructuring of countries' domestic social and economic arrangements—rather than stopping at discrete projects, in the case of the World Bank; or at macroeconomic variables, in the case of the IMF; or at national borders, in the case of the GATT/WTO. They justify the intrusion on the grounds that the neoliberal agenda is the only correct direction for developing as well as developed economies.

The evidence, of course, is far from convincing. The three agreements that emerged from the Uruguay Round in 1996—on intellectual property (TRIPS), investment measures (TRIMs) and trade in services (GATS)—demonstrate how, in the name of open markets and mutual benefit, the system is being rigged even more strongly in favour of the advanced capitalist states. TRIPS is essentially a massive *protection* agreement for firms and other patent- and copyright holders in developed countries, ensuring them large net flows of royalties and fees. TRIMs and GATS, between them, list virtually all the industrial and technology policies used by East Asian governments to nurture

indigenous firms and industries, and then declare the vast majority of them illegal. Although the agreements are worded to suggest a balance between the rights and obligations of developed and developing countries, closer scrutiny shows that, for the advanced capitalist world, their rights are enforceable but their obligations are more open ended; while for developing countries, the opposite holds. The TRIPS agreement specifies that the developing countries will enforce 20-year minimum patent periods over a wide range of products; if they fail to do so they can be taken to the WTO's dispute-settlement mechanism and are likely to lose. The mechanism has real teeth—punishments can include quite severe restrictions on offending states' market access. The developed countries, meanwhile, agree in principle to 'transfer' their technology; but they are unlikely to be penalized through the dispute-settlement mechanism should they neglect to do so.

Established in 1947, within the framework of development economics, the GATT had legitimized a relationship of non-reciprocity that was supposed to aid a catch-up between core and periphery—the idea of 'special and differential treatment', in which developing countries' increased access to markets in the advanced world were not matched by reductions in their own tariff protection. When the WTO was created from the GATT in 1995, differential treatment was redefined as merely allowing developing countries longer adjustment periods in which to implement neoliberal policies. There is little scope under WTO rules to permit a range of development strategies, such as state assistance to new firms and industries that are trying to establish themselves in the face of competition from mature producers elsewhere. The net effect of these policies is likely to 'pull up the ladder', making it more difficult for developing countries to catch up with the prosperity of the advanced world.

How is it, then, that these countries have come to sign up to such punitive agreements? Unlike the IMF and the World Bank—famously run on the 'one dollar, one vote' principle—the WTO operates on an ostensibly more democratic consensus model, in which the voices of individual member states are given equal consideration. As Moore puts it:

The WTO system is built upon the rule of law and respect for the sovereign equality of nations. Ultimately, it is an open, rules-based multilateral trading system, based on democratic values. It is the most democratic international body in existence today . . . No one is forced to sign our agreements. Each and every one of the WTO's rules is negotiated by member governments and agreed by consensus . . . Because no decision is taken unless all member governments agree, effectively every country—from the largest to the smallest—has the power of veto.

In reality, of course, as the process of his own instatement as Director-General at the WTO's Geneva HQ suggests, some states are a great deal more

equal than others. In parallel with Annan's appointment at the UN, Moore was the Clinton Administration's candidate, initially opposed by large numbers of WTO member states who had been promised that, after Renato Ruggiero, the next DG would come from a developing country. But as Moore explains, 'WTO ambassador Rita Hayes from South Carolina, a skilful politician and diplomat with strong contacts in the Senate and White House, was very supportive. I would not have got the job without her'. His attraction for the White House seems clear. Born in 1949 in Whakatane, New Zealand, Moore worked as a meat-packer before clawing his way up through Labour politics to become a strongly pro-US Trade Minister in Lange's government; and, for a few weeks, Prime Minister—leading Labour to disastrous defeat in the 1990 election, as the country plunged into recession following Lange's shock-therapy neoliberalization. American trade officials had evidently noted him as a useful bruiser with a populist manner.

For as Aileen Kwa points out in her useful Focus on the Global South study, 'Power Politics in the WTO', far from being 'rules-based', it is the organization's very lack of formalized internal structures that helps to serve the interests of the powerful. In the manufacture of the global consensus by which the WTO operates, silence is taken for agreement. Bullying, arm-twisting and bribery can be useful tactics in producing closed lips. With no formal provisions surrounding the drafting of documents, agendas can legitimately be stitched up by a select few, behind the closed doors of the famous Green Room, and presented as a *fait accompli*. No rules govern the conduct of meetings—allowing Charlene Barshefsky, US Trade Representative, both to chair the talks and lead the American negotiating team at the 1999 WTO conclave in Seattle, for example. Moore's talents would find an obvious home here. Read against the grain, his book confirms Kwa's findings of an institutionalized regime of intimidation, marginalization and outright coercion to ensure that the Quad countries (US, EU, Japan and Canada) get what they want.

In forging an agenda for a new round of trade talks, Moore's first task—'through hard work, aggression and more than a little arrogance on my part'—was to break down the resistance of the African and Asian trade ministers who had rebelled at Seattle against the US and EU's retention of massive farm subsidies. One tactic was to lard the Draft Declaration with talk of development—the word occurs 63 times in the 10-page document—while quietly inserting the new issues (rules on investment and competition policy) that the West wanted. Another was to find a site relatively free of the protesters that had made Seattle look, in Moore's description, 'like the bar scene from *Star Wars*', with the official opening delayed for half a day while Kofi Annan and Madeleine Albright were imprisoned by demonstrators in a hotel across town. The Qatari trade minister's offer of the Doha conference centre was, unsurprisingly, 'very attractive'.

Equally important was the practice, described by both Moore and Kwa, of going over the heads of wro ambassadors at Geneva—often highly educated in the technical nuances of trade issues—to put direct pressure on their governments. As one delegate explained to Kwa, ‘If the us phones my capital, they won’t say, “There’s this boy, he’s trying to change TRIPS for the good of his country”. They’ll say, “There is this boy, working against the interests of the us, infringing on the good relationship between the us and ——.”’ Critical wro ambassadors were increasingly targeted in the run-up to Doha, with permanent pressure exercised on domestic governments for their removal.

Africa was the main focus of Moore’s attention. Key trade ministers—Erwin in South Africa, Boutros Ghali in Egypt, Bello in Nigeria, Biwott in Kenya—were courted for their cooperation. He particularly applauds the wisdom of inviting a group of African leaders to the G8 summit in Genoa: ‘A turning-point. They supported our objectives’. The coercion came with promises of sweeteners. As Kwa reports, the Tanzanian trade minister, coordinator of the Least Developed Countries Group, received constant telephone calls in the weeks prior to Doha criticizing his ‘no new issues’ stance. Moore, according to one delegate, took to phoning ministers at home at the weekend to pressure them for cooperation. A week after Trade Minister Simba had expressed his ‘sense of happiness’ at the final outcome, Dar es Salaam received \$3 billion in debt relief from the IMF.

The murderous attacks of September 11 were, of course, very helpful in forging the consensus at Doha, two months later. Moore, with us Trade Representative Zoellick and EU Trade Commissioner Lamy, toured developing-country capitals to insist that the new free-trade round would be a blow against Al-Qaeda—and that objectors would be considered as renegades in the war on terror. Once gathered at Doha, as Moore recounts, the trusty lieutenants went to work:

The wise and experienced minister from Brazil, Celso Lafer, South Africa’s Irwin [sic], Egypt’s Boutros Ghali and Nigeria’s Bello worked the African caucus. Kenyan minister Biwott explained to the African, Caribbean and Pacific caucus that the waiver decision was good news . . . I was able to move around friends and coalitions I had spent the previous two years cultivating, to point out where their interests were addressed.

The developing countries had resolutely objected to the inclusion of the new Singapore issues (investment, competition, etc.) in the Draft Declaration. But the text, as one Third World delegate explained to Kwa, had a magical quality: ‘We would make objections, but these would not appear’. A Green Room was carefully selected by the French Deputy DG, Paul-Henri Ravier, on the grounds that it was not too large. Only 23 countries could be squeezed

in to attend the drafting sessions there. The Declaration, when it finally emerged, contained the Singapore issues. Erwin played a crucial role in talking a joint ACP-LDC-Africa Group meeting through the reasons why they should accept it, nevertheless. Since such groups have informally agreed to operate on the principle of unanimity, it is easy enough for one country's representatives to block the rest—and for the us, or other G7 states, to 'buy' one or two of these to act as their agents to prevent the group reaching a collective position. Faced with one member's intransigent opposition, the group does not expel that country and move on, but falls into disarray—as happened at Doha. In the final session, Moore sat beside the Qatari trade minister, the ostensible chair, instructing him on who should speak; the unmistakable Antipodean tones—'Don't give him the floor!'—echoing loud and clear through a serendipitously live mike. Thus was consensus achieved.

The formula brutally pushed through at Doha notably failed at Cancún. Talk of development turned out to be just that, while Europe, the us and Japan have shown no signs of eliminating the subsidies to their farmers that allow them to dump grain, sugar, cotton and other commodities onto world markets at a fraction of the cost of production. Best of all, from the Quad countries' point of view, wto rules now prevent developing countries from protecting themselves and their farmers. Only if the us and others start to make the link between their trade policies and the blowback effects on the stability of their societies—between the increase of subsidized us corn exports to the Philippines, for example, and the growth of communist and Islamic fundamentalist guerrillas on the island of Mindanao, home to two-thirds of the Philippines' small corn farmers—does this seem likely, in the short term, to change.

But if the outcome of the Doha Round appears to be deadlock, what of Moore's second key task? While the front cover of *World Without Walls* shows a giant *papier-mâché* puppet of the author with a sign around its neck proclaiming 'Michael Moore starves the poor', the back is adorned with a photograph of Moore and the Chinese trade secretary Shi Guangsheng, waving their brimming champagne flutes in celebration of China's accession to the wto. The crucial negotiations, Moore notes, had already taken place on a bilateral basis between Beijing and Washington, signed in 1999. Here, China agreed to a deal 'far in excess of expectations—and in excess of the requirements of many members of Congress'. The us would retain extraordinary provisions for tariffs to defend its domestic market against what was loosely defined as a 'surge' of Chinese imports, whereas China would concede to a brutally swift dismantling of protection for local farmers and manufacturers and vastly increased freedoms for foreign firms and financial services. Moore has nothing but praise for the Chinese negotiators at Geneva, who were infallibly 'pleasant and professional' as they acceded to far

more stringent demands than those imposed on other countries—an annual Transitional Review Mechanism, extended over at least a decade, compared to the normal four- or six-yearly audit, for example. While extolling the size of the new market now opened up to Quad countries' goods and services, Moore's language betrays the coercive nature of the deal. With China in the wro, market liberalization will be 'irreversible'. The reforms are now 'locked in', and wro commitments can be used 'as a lever' against those resisting the new policies. Other states can now bring their complaints about China to the wro dispute-settlement mechanism, whose decisions can be stringently enforced. Here lies the organization's real success.

Moore is relentlessly upbeat about the beneficial effects for developing countries in opening their markets—'the evidence is overwhelming'. So much so, that there is no reason to wait for reciprocal opening by developed countries: 'We need to remind ourselves that unilateral trade liberalization is good in itself, and that if others do not reciprocate with their own reductions of trade barriers, there is a case for nations to unilaterally "go alone".' Fortunately, 'more and more, developing countries have come to see protectionism as a self-inflicted wound'.

In common with the great majority of economists who prescribe unilateral free trade for developing countries, Moore thinks in essentially static terms. The switch from a 'protected' to an 'unprotected' economy is Pareto efficient—some could be made better off without anyone else suffering. Free-trade advocates admit that, in the real world, there are 'transitional' costs—people thrown out of work, not yet re-employed in the expanding sectors; but insist that 'trickle down' will work for them in the end. The problem is that an economy—most economies—can get stuck in the transitional phase. Often the alternative to protected, inefficient employment is not unprotected, efficient employment but no employment at all. At the same time, IMF and World Bank structural-adjustment packages require governments to strip away social protections for those unable to find work—and with them, the possibility of the winners from trade liberalization compensating the losers. Together with the wro agreements, they prohibit the use of protection or subsidies as part of any industrial strategy to stimulate new activities beyond those that might occur in free-market conditions. This is a recipe for slower growth, higher poverty, higher unemployment and higher crime. But in a world of nominally sovereign states, the costs can be left to national governments to handle, while the metropolitan countries get the benefits of open access to developing-country markets, without having to bear colonial costs. This is the 'post-imperial' empire.

Samir Naqqash, *Shlomo Alkundi wa ana wa alzaman [Shlomo Alkundi, Myself and Time]*
Manshurat Aljamal (Al-Kamel Verlag): Cologne 2004, €16, paperback
360 pp

NANCY HAWKER

MIZRAHI WANDERINGS

Samir Naqqash is a leading Israeli novelist who writes only in his mother tongue: Arabic. Born into a Jewish family in Baghdad in 1938, he was a youthful witness to the turbulent period of Iraqi struggles against the British puppet government, led by Nuri Said. Iraqi Jews were by far the largest and most prosperous indigenous Jewish community in the Middle East at the time and played a significant role in the cultural, social and political life of the region. They were also, for the most part, staunchly anti-Zionist. Despite ongoing agitation for immigration to Mandate Palestine, the Iraqi Communist Party was a much stronger pole of attraction than the underground Zionist Hehalutz. 'Iraqi patriotism', as well as a notion of the Soviet Union as a bulwark against Nazism, were common Jewish motives for joining the ICP. In November 1947 the General Council of the Iraqi Jewish community sent a telegram to the UN General Assembly opposing the partition of Palestine and the creation of a Jewish state. On the urging of its own Jewish members, the ICP issued an official protest against the Soviet Union's vote for the establishment of Israel at the UN Security Council—the only Arab Communist Party to do so.

Pressures on the community increased in 1950 when Nuri Said, working in tandem with the Zionist Agency and with London's full backing, instituted a voluntary 'denaturalization' programme for Iraqi Jews that would strip them of their nationality, citizenship and property rights, and give them twelve months to leave the country. The initial take-up for this programme was around 12,000, even though the Zionist Agency gave assurances that, so long as they could provide documentation, the Jews would be compensated for their confiscated assets once in Israel. During

the course of 1950, however, a spate of grenade attacks near Jewish cafés and public places in Baghdad resulted in an increase of applicants for denaturalization to over 120,000. To this day it is not clear who was behind the terror.

The thirteen-year-old Samir Naqqash and his family were among the Iraqi Jews transported to Israel in the 1951 airlift and subsequently housed in makeshift transit camps, together with immigrants from other Arab countries. Instead of the promised compensation, their carefully preserved bills and deeds were used as an excuse by the Israeli government to deny the Palestinians' countervailing rights to property confiscated by the infant state in 1949. (In 1952, when news came that two leaders of the remaining Zionist movement in Iraq had been hanged on charges of terrorism, the reaction of many Iraqi Jews in the camps was, according to a ministerial report of the time: 'God's revenge on the movement that brought us to such depths!') The Labour Zionist elite combined European prejudices as to Arab inferiority with the strategic need, as they saw it, to populate the land of Israel with Jews. Their co-religionists, 'rediscovered' in Arab lands after the Judeocide had drastically reduced the pool of potential European immigrants, were treated as purely demographic material. As an Israeli emissary to Libya reported, the Jews there were 'handsome as far as physique and outward appearance are concerned, but I found it very hard to tell them apart from the good quality Arab type'. Arab Jews were deployed as construction workers—literally, 'builders of Israel'—and subjected to strategic settlement and re-education plans by the newly entrenched European Zionist elite. The young Naqqash received a Hebrew education—a language he speaks very well. Yet his stories—the first of five collections appeared in 1971—and subsequent novels and plays are defiantly written in his native tongue.

Naqqash's latest novel, his fifth, *Shlomo Alkundi, Myself and Time*, is published this month by the independent Manshurat Aljamel press, a small Arab-language publishing house run by Iraqi exiles in Cologne. One of Israel's foremost living novelists, his work is barely visible in that country and only one story has been translated (by his sister Ruth) into Hebrew. In true postmodern style, *Shlomo Alkundi* begins at the end; but the themes and feelings of the novel are unfashionably historicized. The year is 1985 and the main character, an elderly Eastern Jew, lives in Ramat Gan, a comfortable if dull suburb of Tel Aviv, where he devotes himself to his memories. The book's first seventy-odd pages consist of an intricately structured recall of the main episodes in a life that has spanned Asia Minor, from the Kurdish city of Sablakh to Tehran and Baghdad, as well as trips (he was a merchant) to Moscow and Bombay; and traversed the century, from the First World War to the 1980s' present. Remembrance is worked out

through two parallel, and complex, sets of conversations: one with Shlomo Kattani (later known as Alkurdi), the persona of the narrator's younger life; and the other, polite if tough-minded, with Time, called upon to assist in recording these memories.

'So ends the story', says the dying—perhaps dead—Shlomo, towards the conclusion of this opening section. 'On the contrary', replies Time. 'It starts now.' The two argue back and forth until Shlomo finally concedes: 'Let matters occur as they wish to occur.' The voice of Time echoes in his head: 'Alright. Let matters occur as they wish.'

What follows is a vivid, more-than-realist account—Time is instructed to omit not so much as 'an atom of cigarette ash'—of Shlomo Kattani's business, love and family affairs in Sablakh, 200 miles north of Baghdad, during the First World War. The themes of time, cosmology and civilization recur, often cast as the metaphysical speculations of those confronted with the unfathomable social cruelty of the modern world. As distinct from the *real maravilloso* that has been seen as the stuff of Latin American literature, Naqqash's aesthetic draws on a 'terrible reality'—in Arabic, *waqi' rahib*—in his narrative fictions of Asia Minor and the Middle East.

A walled-and-gated city built of reddish stone, surrounded by hills of walnut, oak and pine, Sablakh—also transcribed as Saubalagh or Sawj Bulaq; present-day Mahabad, in northwest Iran—is best known historically as the site where the People's Republic of Kurdistan was first declared in 1946. During the First World War, and the dying days of the Ottoman Empire, its chief notable, Qazi Fattah, attempted to forge links with Bolshevik elements in the Tsar's army. Naqqash's narrative begins in 1914, with the young Jewish merchant Kattani's marriage to a local girl, Asmar, arranged by their fathers. Soon after, Kattani—the name means 'linen'—departs on a trade trip to Moscow with his business partner, Abu Mohammed. The wagons, laden with spices, wool bales and ceramics, will roll through a war-torn land: with British collusion, the Tsar's forces had taken the Azeri, Armenian and Kurdish regions from a weakened Persia some years before, and instigated risings among the Christian Armenians against their Muslim lords. With German backing, the Ottomans now contested Russian control.

While her husband is away, however, Asmar gets wind of the town gossip about him and Esther, the beautiful fifteen-year-old daughter of another Jewish merchant. 'Is this the effect of Esther?' she innocently inquires, when Kattani proves insufficiently amorous on his return. Embarrassed, he prevaricates. But soon after Asmar is blithely congratulating him: 'One thousand blessings upon you: her father has agreed. You can have Esther as a second wife'. Somewhat taken aback, Kattani has no choice but to consent: 'She was much stronger than me'. On the morning after his wedding night

with Esther, Asmar discomforts him further by bringing the couple breakfast in bed. Kattani takes her aside: 'You are the lady of the house, a servant should be doing this'. But the domestic drama is interrupted: a messenger has arrived from Tehran, summoning the bridegroom to an audience with the Shah of Persia.

The three-day journey to the palace is fraught with danger. Kattani is set upon by a band of rebellious Kurdish tribesmen, but gains their protection once they recognize him as a Sablakhi Jew, a Kurd like themselves. Their sense of community impresses him. By comparison, the occupant of the Peacock Throne is altogether less compelling. 'Come forward', calls the last scion of the Qajar dynasty, a diminutive figure. 'Kneel', commands the burly Palace Guard. Struck by the absurdity of the situation, Kattani can only remain prostrate, laughing into the carpet. The Shah wants to know all about his contacts in Moscow. 'I am only a merchant Jew. I don't know anything about anything.' Then has he had any contacts with the rebels? The Kurds, his Majesty warns, are preparing for revolution. Remembering his protectors, Kattani makes his obeisances and denials.

Back home he confers with Asmar, now in complete command, who reports rumours of trouble in the north. The bitter cold of the 1915 winter keeps the people of Sablakh in their homes, but outside they hear the tramping of military boots and words of a language that the polyglot Kattani has picked up on his travels: Russian. He is the translator when the Sablakh notables are summoned to the Russian Consul's residence, and the only one to understand His Excellency's speech:

People of Sablakh! The Tsar's army has entered your town in order to protect you and defend you against the Ottomans and their German allies. We will not hurt you nor your town, so go on with your work and do not pay attention to what is not your business. Woe upon the one who puts himself in the way of the army of the holy Tsar, and who helps his enemies.

Uncomprehending, the townspeople nod their approval: 'Long live Tsar Nikolai the Second!'

'What is going to happen?' asks the Rabbi afterwards.

'The snowstorm is gathering force', Kattani replies.

'War!' is the Rabbi's response.

Enver Pasha's army is sweeping eastward across the region, urging Kurds to take their revenge on the Armenians. Stories of the massacres reach Sablakh. The Russians evacuate the city and, in 1916, the Ottomans arrive. The Jews are scared by talk of an official 'allegiance to Islam', knowing what this has meant to Armenian Christians. Kattani discusses the situation with Abu Mohammed, who is reassuring: 'This craziness will pass'. On the contrary, as Kattani—and the narrator—are about to realize, the 'lunacy'

of the world' has just begun. Famine descends on the previously prosperous town. Kattani now has five children to feed, and Esther is starting to go mad. The constant preoccupation with getting food for the household is superseded by fear for their lives when fifteen Jews (the Rabbi among them) and twenty-three Christians are killed by Ottoman troops.

'We have been asked to be Russians, Ottomans, Persians and Azeris. But we are Hebrews', declares a speaker at a meeting of the town's Jews to discuss the crisis. Kattani's muttered objection is stubborn: 'We are Sablakhis, Jewish Kurds'. But his determination to stay is shaken when Esther and her two children are savagely killed by Ottoman soldiers. When his young son Salman asks for an explanation, he is at a loss to describe the injustice of the world. Unwillingly—like so many others—Kattani hands over the keys to his house and business to Abu Mohammed, packs up the family possessions and departs with the Kurdish-Jewish caravan to Baghdad.

The reader knows, from the first section of the novel, what will follow. The family now live in circumstances much reduced from their fine Sablakhi home, with its courtyard and fountain. Kattani—now known as 'the Kurd', Alkurdi—has a small shop in the bazaar in Baghdad's city centre. On a trip to Bombay in 1924, he picks up the idea of selling second-hand clothes—a novelty that earns him a second fortune in what is now British-run Iraq. Nationalist tensions are on the rise. In 1941, a local coup attempt against Nuri Said is put down by the British. On the principle that 'my enemy's enemy is my friend', some of the nationalist elements had taken up Nazi propaganda themes when Britain declared war on Germany. Frustrated, they now vent their rage on local Jews in the attack known as the *farhud*, which claimed two hundred lives. The massacre has its reflection in the novel: Alkurdi is called to the street where Asmar lies, fatally stabbed. In 1951, his now grown-up children opt for denaturalization and the airlift to Israel, but Alkurdi cannot bear to go with them. Iraqi officers arrive as he sits sipping coffee in his shop in the now deserted Jewish quarter. The Kurd is now an Iranian in the eyes of the authorities, and must be forcibly deported to Tehran. In his drunken musings there, he dreams of returning to reclaim his business in Baghdad. Events conspire against him once more, however, and he ends up in Israel—a Jew forced to wander. An old man, he looks back on his life from Ramat Gan.

But the novel itself ends with the exile from Sablakh, a description that evokes the similitude of the refugee condition everywhere—not least the Baghddadi Jews' transfer to Israel and Arab dispossession in Palestine.

The caravan proceeds deeper on the trail; soon the sun sets. The wagons are swallowed by darkness and the unknown. They dream of purchasing

their lives in another country. Their rulers did not protect them of their own accord, and did not ward off the injustice of exile. They fled, taking with them junk. Junk, distant beloved Sablakh . . . and so, Sablakh, we became junk. At night the colour of the raven lies on the world and the fleeing caravans hurry forward in the darkness toward western borders. The people have already lost their identity . . . They hasten across the land of their ancestors, swallowed by the night. Shortly they will be swallowed by the lands of another, strange country, to become a group of poor immigrants, refugees.

The rupture in self-identity caused by migration resonates within the grammar of the novel: Alkurdī is variously presented in the first, second or third-person singular: is the dying man still the same person? At a meeting between the two in Ramat Gan, the narrator is in awe of his younger alter-ego, whose impressive history the book recounts. With a trembling hand, Alkurdī offers him a plate of bananas and apples:

Remember, my youth, try tol! And eat another banana or apple. This remained the land of oranges. In Sablakh, they did not come in such quantities. Sablakh, its hills and valleys, where walnuts, acorns and pines grew.

The seemingly prosaic detail of the fruit in this declamatory passage is not without meaning. The 'Land of Oranges' is a literary appellation for pre-Zionist Palestine. Its orange groves were renowned and the harvest exported. Israeli plantations and irrigation systems brought bananas and apples but the land remained, indeed, that of oranges. The novel insists on recalling erased narratives such as these; and in nationalist histories of the modern Middle East, those of the Kurds and Arab Jews are even more forgotten than the Palestinians'. Alkurdī's only power is his ability to remember—as resistance but also as revenge, against the enemies who destroyed Sablakh, killed his wives or brought him to live as an alienated refugee in Israel. His reproach against Time is that it has tried to dull his vengeful determination, as he drifted through the scenes of his exile. This work is a reply to Time, the product of that will.

Although much of Naqqash's fiction has an autobiographical basis, this novel is a partial exception. Shlomo Kattani Alkurdī was a neighbour of Naqqash's in Tehran in the sixties, with whom he would share a drink and talk about the past—Alkurdī on occasion getting so drunk he would shout abuse at his attentive interlocutor. However fantastical the narration at times, the story is true. The themes it brings together, however, are typical of Naqqash's work as a whole. Some have characterized his attitude as nostalgic, and certainly *Shlomo Alkurdī* indicates a preoccupation with realities long gone. But his last novel, *The Angels' Genitalia* (1996), also published by Manshurat Aljamal, contains striking, surreal descriptions of the travails of

an Arab Jew—with his ‘terrorist’ face—at a Ben Gurion Airport checkpoint; though not more surreal than the everyday reality.

Marginalized in Israel, where his self-description as an exile from Iraq flies in the face of Zionist claims to have ‘rescued’ Baghdadi Jews from a ‘holocaust’, Naqqash’s battleground is the Arab literary scene. Here, he introduces the concept that Jews also have an Arab history—whereas Israeli–Arab antagonism has categorized the two identities as mutually exclusive. Of course, Middle Eastern Jews—*Mizrahim*, in Hebrew—have for centuries been part of the cultural mosaic of identities that formed the social horizons of the region before the rise of nationalism.

Other Iraqi-Jewish writers of similar anti-Zionist conviction—Shimon Ballas or Sami Mikhael, for example, both well known in Israel—have now chosen to write in Hebrew, or sometimes in both languages, and to fight their ground within the Israeli scene. This allows them a less isolated position than that of Naqqash and perhaps more influence in challenging Zionist sensibilities. Israeli literary circles puzzle over Naqqash’s refusal to write in Hebrew—a question to which Naqqash replied (in Hebrew) with some asperity in a recent interview: ‘What do you want of me? I am only preserving my autonomy!’ This defiance is perhaps what best characterizes his literary project. He is ‘simply’ writing in his own mother tongue, a global language; it is the world around him and its ‘lunacy’ that have made it a political struggle to do so.

The reception of this Israeli writer in the Arab literary world has also been guarded, although the Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz has called him ‘one of the greatest living artists writing in Arabic today’. Here, though, Naqqash’s particular linguistic politics have created further difficulties. Naqqash writes in the high Arabic common in *belles lettres*, but in the frequent conversations between Iraqi Jews in his work he uses a particular Baghdadi-Jewish dialect spoken, in the late 1940s, by perhaps 140,000 of the city’s inhabitants and only 80 per cent intelligible to their Muslim or Christian compatriots. Today it is almost a dead tongue, and even Naqqash’s fellow Iraqi Jews have complained that it makes for difficult reading and has to be supplemented with intra-Arabic translations. Again, the use of a Jewish–Arabic language that nationalists on all sides would rather forget makes him doubly alienated—though his focus on language, politics and identity has attracted the attention of postcolonial literary studies. In contrast to such psychological preoccupations, other Iraqi-Jewish intellectuals in Israel have tended to focus on social and class issues. Some, such as Sasson Somekh and David Semah, have attempted to create a common Arab front—pioneering Palestinian issues, publishing articles and poems in Arabic anti-establishment newspapers such as *Al-Jadid* in the fifties.

Shimon Ballas's first novella in Hebrew, 'The Transit Camp' of 1964, also indicates a more material concern with the Arab Jews' plight. The two approaches complement each other in valuable ways, but perhaps it is time to translate Naqqash's writings into Hebrew, as much-needed rebuttal of a world-view that would deny Jews a meaningful history outside the State of Israël—or, on the other hand, would erase an older Jewish history within the wider Middle East.

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After 'Graphs' (see NLR 24), maps: geography, or social geometry? Literary spaces plotted as competing fields for industrialization, peasant rebellion, state formation. The second of Moretti's three essays conceptualizing patterns of genre and history, form and force.

EDGARDO COZARINSKY: Letter from Buenos Aires

New Wave Argentine cinema—documentaries from the badlands, *taxi boys* on roller-skates, *escrache* protests—thriving after the crash of 2001, in the diary of an émigré practitioner.

BOOK REVIEWS

EMMANUEL TERRAY on Bernard Stasi, *Laïcité et République*. The French political establishment's vapours over school-girl head-dress.

TONY WOOD on John Bowlt et al., eds, *Nikolai Khardzhiev, A Legacy Regained*. Matchless archive of art and writings from avant-garde Russia, and an old man at the mercy of the West.

MICHAEL RUSTIN on Roberto Unger, *Democracy Realized*. A Brazilian alternative to both free-market and social-democratic orthodoxies—experimentalism as transformative political practice.

GOPAL BALAKRISHNAN on Benno Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*. Recasting the origins of the modern state system within the matrix of emerging capitalist relations.

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See also NLR 24*

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MIKE DAVIS

PLANET OF SLUMS

Urban Involution and the Informal Proletariat

SOMETIMES IN THE next year, a woman will give birth in the Lagos slum of Ajegunle, a young man will flee his village in west Java for the bright lights of Jakarta, or a farmer will move his impoverished family into one of Lima's innumerable *pueblos jóvenes*. The exact event is unimportant and it will pass entirely unnoticed. Nonetheless it will constitute a watershed in human history. For the first time the urban population of the earth will outnumber the rural. Indeed, given the imprecisions of Third World censuses, this epochal transition may already have occurred.

The earth has urbanized even faster than originally predicted by the Club of Rome in its notoriously Malthusian 1972 report, *Limits of Growth*. In 1950 there were 86 cities in the world with a population over one million; today there are 400, and by 2015, there will be at least 550.¹ Cities, indeed, have absorbed nearly two-thirds of the global population explosion since 1950 and are currently growing by a million babies and migrants each week.² The present urban population (3.2 billion) is larger than the total population of the world in 1960. The global countryside, meanwhile, has reached its maximum population (3.2 billion) and will begin to shrink after 2020. As a result, cities will account for all future world population growth, which is expected to peak at about 10 billion in 2050.³

I. THE URBAN CLIMACTERIC

Where are the heroes, the colonisers, the victims of the Metropolis?
Brecht, Diary entry, 1921

Ninety-five per cent of this final buildout of humanity will occur in the urban areas of developing countries, whose population will double to nearly 4 billion over the next generation.⁴ (Indeed, the combined urban population of China, India and Brazil already roughly equals that of Europe plus North America.) The most celebrated result will be the burgeoning of new megacities with populations in excess of 8 million, and, even more spectacularly, hypercities with more than 20 million inhabitants (the estimated urban population of the world at the time of the French Revolution).⁵ In 1995 only Tokyo had uncontestedly reached that threshold. By 2025, according to the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Asia alone could have ten or eleven conurbations that large, including Jakarta (24.9 million), Dhaka (25 million) and Karachi (26.5 million). Shanghai, whose growth was frozen for decades by Maoist policies of deliberate under-urbanization, could have as many as 27 million residents in its huge estuarial metro-region.⁶ Mumbai (Bombay) meanwhile is projected to attain a population of 33 million, although no one knows whether such gigantic concentrations of poverty are biologically or ecologically sustainable.⁷

¹ UN Population Division, *World Urbanization Prospects, the 2001 Revision*, New York 2002.

² Population Information Program, *Population Reports. Meeting the Urban Challenge*, vol. xxx, no. 4, Fall 2002, p. 1.

³ Wolfgang Lutz, Warren Sanderson and Sergei Scherbov, 'Doubling of world population unlikely', *Nature* 387, 19 June 1997, pp. 803–4. However the populations of sub-Saharan Africa will triple and India, double.

⁴ Global Urban Observatory, *Slums of the World: The face of urban poverty in the new millennium?*, New York 2003, p. 10.

⁵ Although the velocity of global urbanization is not in doubt, the growth rates of specific cities may brake abruptly as they encounter the frictions of size and congestion. A famous instance of such a 'polarization reversal' is Mexico City: widely predicted to achieve a population of 25 million during the 1990s (the current population is probably about 18 or 19 million). See Yue-man Yeung, 'Geography in an age of mega-cities', *International Social Sciences Journal* 151, 1997, p. 93.

⁶ For a perspective, see Yue-Man Yeung, 'Viewpoint: Integration of the Pearl River Delta', *International Development Planning Review*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2003.

⁷ *Far Eastern Economic Review, Asia* 1998 Yearbook, p. 63.

But if megacities are the brightest stars in the urban firmament, three-quarters of the burden of population growth will be borne by faintly visible second-tier cities and smaller urban areas: places where, as UN researchers emphasize, 'there is little or no planning to accommodate these people or provide them with services'.⁸ In China (officially 43 per cent urban in 1997), the number of official cities has soared from 193 to 640 since 1978. But the great metropolises, despite extraordinary growth, have actually declined in relative share of urban population. It is, rather, the small cities and recently 'citized' towns that have absorbed the majority of the rural labour-power made redundant by post-1979 market reforms.⁹ In Africa, likewise, the supernova-like growth of a few giant cities like Lagos (from 300,000 in 1950 to 10 million today) has been matched by the transformation of several dozen small towns and oases like Ouagadougou, Nouakchott, Douala, Antananarivo and Bamako into cities larger than San Francisco or Manchester. In Latin America, where primary cities long monopolized growth, secondary cities like Tijuana, Curitiba, Temuco, Salvador and Belém are now booming, 'with the fastest growth of all occurring in cities with between 100,000 and 500,000 inhabitants'.¹⁰

Moreover, as Gregory Guldin has urged, urbanization must be conceptualized as structural transformation along, and intensified interaction between, every point of an urban–rural continuum. In his case-study of southern China, the countryside is urbanizing *in situ* as well as generating epochal migrations. 'Villages become more like market and *xiang* towns, and county towns and small cities become more like large cities.' The result in China and much of Southeast Asia is a hermaphroditic landscape, a partially urbanized countryside that Guldin and others argue may be 'a significant new path of human settlement and development . . . a form neither rural nor urban but a blending of the two wherein a dense web of transactions ties large urban cores to their surrounding regions'.¹¹ In Indonesia, where a similar process

⁸ UN-Habitat, *The Challenge of the Slums. Global Report on Human Settlements 2003*, London 2003, p. 3.

⁹ Gregory Guldin, *What's a Peasant to Do? Village Becoming Town in Southern China*, Boulder, co 2001, p. 13.

¹⁰ Miguel Villa and Jorge Rodriguez, 'Demographic trends in Latin America's metropolises, 1950–1990', in Alan Gilbert, ed., *The Mega-City in Latin America*, Tokyo 1996, pp. 33–4.

¹¹ Guldin, *Peasant*, pp. 14, 17. See also Jing Neng Li, 'Structural and Spatial Economic changes and their Effects on Recent Urbanization in China', in Gavin Jones and Pravin Visaria, eds, *Urbanization in Large Developing Countries*, Oxford 1997, p. 44.

of rural/urban hybridization is far advanced in Jabotabek (the greater Jakarta region), researchers call these novel land-use patterns *desokotas* and debate whether they are transitional landscapes or a dramatic new species of urbanism.¹²

Urbanists also speculate about the processes weaving together Third World cities into extraordinary new networks, corridors and hierarchies. For example, the Pearl River (Hong Kong–Guangzhou) and the Yangtze River (Shanghai) deltas, along with the Beijing–Tianjin corridor, are rapidly developing into urban-industrial megalopolises comparable to Tokyo–Osaka, the lower Rhine, or New York–Philadelphia. But this may only be the first stage in the emergence of an even larger structure: ‘a continuous urban corridor stretching from Japan/North Korea to West Java’.¹³ Shanghai, almost certainly, will then join Tokyo, New York and London as one of the ‘world cities’ controlling the global web of capital and information flows. The price of this new urban order will be increasing inequality within and between cities of different sizes and specializations. Guldin, for example, cites intriguing Chinese discussions over whether the ancient income-and-development chasm between city and countryside is now being replaced by an equally fundamental gap between small cities and the coastal giants.¹⁴

2. BACK TO DICKENS

I saw innumerable hosts, foredoomed to darkness, dirt, pestilence, obscenity, misery and early death.

Dickens, ‘A December Vision’, 1850

The dynamics of Third World urbanization both recapitulate and confound the precedents of nineteenth and early twentieth-century Europe and North America. In China the greatest industrial revolution in history is the Archimedean lever shifting a population the size of Europe’s from

¹² See T. McGee, ‘The Emergence of Desakota Regions in Asia. Expanding a Hypothesis’, in Norton Ginsburg, Bruce Koppell and T. McGee, eds, *The Extended Metropolis: Settlement Transition in Asia*, Honolulu 1991.

¹³ Yue-man Yeung and Fu-chen Lo, ‘Global restructuring and emerging urban corridors in Pacific Asia’, in Lo and Yeung, eds, *Emerging World Cities in Pacific Asia*, Tokyo 1996, p. 41.

¹⁴ Guldin, *Peasant*, p. 13.

rural villages to smog-choked sky-climbing cities. As a result, 'China [will] cease to be the predominantly rural country it has been for millennia.'¹⁵ Indeed, the great oculus of the Shanghai World Financial Centre may soon look out upon a vast urban world little imagined by Mao or, for that matter, Le Corbusier. But in most of the developing world, city growth lacks China's powerful manufacturing-export engine as well as its vast inflow of foreign capital (currently equal to half of total foreign investment in the developing world).

Urbanization elsewhere, as a result, has been radically decoupled from industrialization, even from development *per se*. Some would argue that this is an expression of an inexorable trend: the inherent tendency of silicon capitalism to delink the growth of production from that of employment. But in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and parts of Asia, urbanization-without-growth is more obviously the legacy of a global political conjuncture—the debt crisis of the late 1970s and subsequent IMF-led restructuring of Third World economies in the 1980s—than an iron law of advancing technology. Third World urbanization, moreover, continued its breakneck pace (3.8 per cent per annum from 1960–93) through the locust years of the 1980s and early 1990s in spite of falling real wages, soaring prices and skyrocketing urban unemployment.¹⁶

This 'perverse' urban boom contradicted orthodox economic models which predicted that the negative feedback of urban recession should slow or even reverse migration from the countryside. The African case was particularly paradoxical. How could cities in Côte d'Ivoire, Tanzania, Gabon and elsewhere—whose economies were contracting by 2 to 5 per cent per year—still sustain population growth of 5 to 8 per cent per

¹⁵ Wang Mengkui, advisor to the State Council, quoted in the *Financial Times*, 26 November 2003. Since the market reforms of the late 1970s it is estimated that almost 300 million Chinese have moved from rural areas to cities. Another 250 or 300 million are expected to follow in coming decades. (*Financial Times*, 16 December 2003.)

¹⁶ Josef Gugler, 'Introduction—II. Rural–Urban Migration', in Gugler, ed., *Cities in the Developing World: Issues, Theory and Policy*, Oxford 1997, p. 43. For a contrarian view that disputes generally accepted World Bank and UN data on continuing high rates of urbanization during the 1980s, see Deborah Potts, 'Urban lives: Adopting new strategies and adapting rural links', in Carole Rakodi, ed., *The Urban Challenge in Africa: Growth and Management of Its Large Cities*, Tokyo 1997, pp. 463–73.

annum.¹⁷ Part of the secret, of course, was that IMF- (and now WTO-) enforced policies of agricultural deregulation and 'de-peasantization' were accelerating the exodus of surplus rural labour to urban slums even as cities ceased to be job machines. Urban population growth in spite of stagnant or negative urban economic growth is the extreme face of what some researchers have labelled 'over-urbanization'.¹⁸ It is just one of the several unexpected tracks down which a neoliberal world order has shunted millennial urbanization.

Classical social theory from Marx to Weber, of course, believed that the great cities of the future would follow in the industrializing footsteps of Manchester, Berlin and Chicago. Indeed, Los Angeles, São Paulo, Pusan and, today, Ciudad Juárez, Bangalore and Guangzhou, have roughly approximated this classical trajectory. But most cities of the South are more like Victorian Dublin which, as Emmet Larkin has emphasized, was unique amongst 'all the slumdoms produced in the western world in the nineteenth century . . . [because] its slums were not a product of the industrial revolution. Dublin, in fact, suffered more from the problems of de-industrialization than industrialization between 1800 and 1850.'¹⁹

Likewise Kinshasa, Khartoum, Dar es Salaam, Dhaka and Lima grow prodigiously despite ruined import-substitution industries, shrunken public sectors and downwardly mobile middle classes. The global forces 'pushing' people from the countryside—mechanization in Java and India, food imports in Mexico, Haiti and Kenya, civil war and drought throughout Africa, and everywhere the consolidation of small into large holdings and the competition of industrial-scale agribusiness—seem to sustain urbanization even when the 'pull' of the city is drastically weakened by debt and depression.²⁰ At the same time, rapid urban growth in the context

¹⁷ David Simon, 'Urbanization, globalization and economic crisis in Africa', in Rakodi, *Urban Challenge*, p. 95.

¹⁸ See Josef Gugler, 'Overurbanization Reconsidered', in Gugler, *Cities in the Developing World*, pp. 114–23. By contrast, the former command economies of the Soviet Union and Maoist China restricted in-migration to cities and thus tended toward 'under-urbanization'.

¹⁹ Foreword to Jacinta Prunty, *Dublin Slums 1800–1925: A Study in Urban Geography*, Dublin 1998, p. ix.

²⁰ 'Thus, it appears that for low income countries, a significant fall in urban incomes may not necessarily produce in the short term a decline in rural–urban migration.' Nigel Harris, 'Urbanization, Economic Development and Policy in Developing Countries', *Habitat International*, vol. 14, no. 4, 1990, p. 21–2.

of structural adjustment, currency devaluation and state retrenchment has been an inevitable recipe for the mass production of slums.²¹ Much of the urban world, as a result, is rushing backwards to the age of Dickens.

The astonishing prevalence of slums is the chief theme of the historic and sombre report published last October by the United Nations' Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat).²² *The Challenge of the Slums* (henceforth: *Slums*) is the first truly global audit of urban poverty. It adroitly integrates diverse urban case-studies from Abidjan to Sydney with global household data that for the first time includes China and the ex-Soviet Bloc. (The UN authors acknowledge a particular debt to Branko Milanovic, the World Bank economist who has pioneered the use of micro-surveys as a powerful lens to study growing global inequality. In one of his papers, Milanovic explains: 'for the first time in human history, researchers have reasonably accurate data on the distribution of income or welfare [expenditures or consumption] amongst more than 90 per cent of the world population'.)²³

Slums is also unusual in its intellectual honesty. One of the researchers associated with the report told me that 'the "Washington Consensus" types (World Bank, IMF, etc.) have always insisted on defining the problem of global slums not as a result of globalization and inequality but rather as a result of "bad governance".' The new report, however, breaks with traditional UN circumspection and self-censorship to squarely indict neoliberalism, especially the IMF's structural adjustment programmes.²⁴ 'The primary direction of both national and international interventions during the last twenty years has actually increased urban poverty and slums, increased exclusion and inequality, and weakened urban elites in their efforts to use cities as engines of growth.'²⁵

²¹ On Third World urbanization and the global debt crisis, see York Bradshaw and Rita Noonan, 'Urbanization, Economic Growth, and Women's Labour-Force Participation', in Gugler, *Cities in the Developing World*, pp. 9–10.

²² *Slums*: for publication details, see footnote 8.

²³ Branko Milanovic, *True world income distribution 1988 and 1993*, World Bank, New York 1999. Milanovic and his colleague Schlomo Yitzhaki are the first to calculate world income distribution based on the household survey data from individual countries.

²⁴ UNICEF, to be fair, has criticized the IMF for years, pointing out that 'hundreds of thousands of the developing world's children have given their lives to pay their countries' debts'. See *The State of the World's Children*, Oxford 1989, p. 30.

²⁵ *Slums*, p. 6.

Slums, to be sure, neglects (or saves for later UN-Habitat reports) some of the most important land-use issues arising from super-urbanization and informal settlement, including sprawl, environmental degradation, and urban hazards. It also fails to shed much light on the processes expelling labour from the countryside or to incorporate a large and rapidly growing literature on the gender dimensions of urban poverty and informal employment. But these cavils aside, *Slums* remains an invaluable exposé that amplifies urgent research findings with the institutional authority of the United Nations. If the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change represent an unprecedented scientific consensus on the dangers of global warming, then *Slums* sounds an equally authoritative warning about the global catastrophe of urban poverty. (A third report someday may explore the ominous terrain of their interaction.)²⁶ And, for the purposes of this review, it provides an excellent framework for reconnoitering contemporary debates on urbanization, the informal economy, human solidarity and historical agency.

3. THE URBANIZATION OF POVERTY

The mountain of trash seemed to stretch very far, then gradually without perceptible demarcation or boundary it became something else. But what? A jumbled and pathless collection of structures. Cardboard cartons, plywood and rotting boards, the rusting and glassless shells of cars, had been thrown together to form habitation

Michael Thelwell, *The Harder They Come*, 1980

The first published definition of 'slum' reportedly occurs in Vaux's 1812 *Vocabulary of the Flash Language*, where it is synonymous with 'racket' or 'criminal trade'.²⁷ By the cholera years of the 1830s and 1840s, however, the poor were living in slums rather than practising them. A generation later, slums had been identified in America and India, and were generally recognized as an international phenomenon. The 'classic slum' was a notoriously parochial and picturesquely local place, but reformers generally agreed with Charles Booth that all slums were characterized by an amalgam of dilapidated housing, overcrowding, poverty and vice. For nineteenth-century Liberals, of course, the moral dimension was

²⁶ Such a study, one supposes, would survey, at one end, urban hazards and infrastructural breakdown and, at the other, the impact of climate change on agriculture and migration.

²⁷ Prunty, *Dublin Slums*, p. 2.

decisive and the slum was first and above all envisioned as a place where a social 'residuum' rots in immoral and often riotous splendour. *Slums'* authors discard Victorian calumnies, but otherwise preserve the classical definition: overcrowding, poor or informal housing, inadequate access to safe water and sanitation, and insecurity of tenure.²⁸

This multi-dimensional definition is actually a very conservative gauge of what qualifies as a slum: many readers will be surprised by the UN's counter-experiential finding that only 19.6 per cent of urban Mexicans live in slums. Yet, even with this restrictive definition, *Slums* estimates that there were at least 921 million slum-dwellers in 2001: nearly equal to the population of the world when the young Engels first ventured onto the mean streets of Manchester. Indeed, neoliberal capitalism has multiplied Dickens's notorious slum of Tom-All-Alone in *Bleak House* by exponential powers. Residents of slums constitute a staggering 78.2 per cent of the urban population of the least developed countries and fully a third of the global urban population.²⁹ Extrapolating from the age structures of most Third World cities, at least half of the slum population is under the age of 20.³⁰

The world's highest percentages of slum-dwellers are in Ethiopia (an astonishing 99.4 per cent of the urban population), Chad (also 99.4 per cent), Afghanistan (98.5 percent) and Nepal (92 per cent).³¹ The poorest urban populations, however, are probably in Maputo and Kinshasa where (according to other sources) two-thirds of residents earn less than the cost of their minimum required daily nutrition.³² In Delhi, planners complain bitterly about 'slums within slums' as squatters take over the small open spaces of the peripheral resettlement colonies into which the old urban poor were brutally removed in the mid-1970s.³³ In Cairo and Phnom Penh, recent urban arrivals squat or rent space on rooftops: creating slum cities in the air.

²⁸ *Slums*, p. 12.

²⁹ *Slums*, pp. 2–3.

³⁰ See A. Oberai, *Population Growth, Employment and Poverty in Third World Mega-Cities*, New York 1993, p. 28. In 1980 the 0–19 cohort of big OECD cities was from 19 to 28 per cent of the population; of Third World mega-cities, 40 to 53 per cent.

³¹ *Slums of the World*, pp. 33–4.

³² Simon, 'Urbanization in Africa', p. 103; and Jean-Luc Piermay, 'Kinshasa: A reprieved mega-city?', in Rakodi, *Urban Challenge*, p. 236.

³³ Sabir Ali, 'Squatters' Slums within Slums', in Prodipto Roy and Shangon Das Gupta, eds, *Urbanization and Slums*, Delhi 1995, pp. 55–9.

Slum populations are often deliberately and sometimes massively undercounted. In the late 1980s, for example, Bangkok had an 'official' poverty rate of only 5 per cent, yet surveys found nearly a quarter of the population (1.16 million) living in slums and squatter camps.³⁴ The UN, likewise, recently discovered that it was unintentionally undercounting urban poverty in Africa by large margins. Slum-dwellers in Angola, for example, are probably twice as numerous as it originally believed. Likewise it underestimated the number of poor urbanites in Liberia: not surprising, since Monrovia tripled its population in a single year (1989–90) as panic-stricken country people fled from a brutal civil war.³⁵

There may be more than quarter of a million slums on earth. The five great metropolises of South Asia (Karachi, Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and Dhaka) alone contain about 15,000 distinct slum communities with a total population of more than 20 million. An even larger slum population crowds the urbanizing littoral of West Africa, while other huge conurbations of poverty sprawl across Anatolia and the Ethiopian highlands; hug the base of the Andes and the Himalayas; explode outward from the skyscraper cores of Mexico, Jo-burg, Manila and São Paulo; and, of course, line the banks of the rivers Amazon, Niger, Congo, Nile, Tigris, Ganges, Irrawaddy and Mekong. The building blocks of this slum planet, paradoxically, are both utterly interchangeable and spontaneously unique: including the *bustees* of Kolkata, the *chawls* and *zopadpattis* of Mumbai, the *katchi abadis* of Karachi, the *kampungs* of Jakarta, the *iskwatters* of Manila, the *shammasas* of Khartoum, the *umjondolos* of Durban, the *intra-murios* of Rabat, the *bidonvilles* of Abidjan, the *baladis* of Cairo, the *gecekondus* of Ankara, the *conventillos* of Quito, the *favelas* of Brazil, the *villas miseria* of Buenos Aires and the *colonias populares* of Mexico City. They are the gritty antipodes to the generic fantasy-scapes and residential themeparks—Philip K. Dick's bourgeois 'Offworlds'—in which the global middle classes increasingly prefer to cloister themselves.

Whereas the classic slum was a decaying inner city, the new slums are more typically located on the edge of urban spatial explosions. The horizontal growth of cities like Mexico, Lagos or Jakarta, of course, has been extraordinary, and 'slum sprawl' is as much of a problem in the developing world as suburban sprawl in the rich countries. The developed area of Lagos, for instance, doubled in a single decade, between

³⁴ Jonathan Rigg, *Southeast Asia: A Region in Transition*, London 1991, p. 143.

³⁵ *Slums of the World*, p. 34

1985 and 1994.³⁶ The Governor of Lagos State told reporters last year that 'about two thirds of the state's total land mass of 3,577 square kilometres could be classified as shanties or slums'.³⁷ Indeed, writes a UN correspondent,

much of the city is a mystery . . . unlit highways run past canyons of smouldering garbage before giving way to dirt streets weaving through 200 slums, their sewers running with raw waste . . . No one even knows for sure the size of the population—officially it is 6 million, but most experts estimate it at 10 million—let alone the number of murders each year [or] the rate of HIV infection.³⁸

Lagos, moreover, is simply the biggest node in the shanty-town corridor of 70 million people that stretches from Abidjan to Ibadan: probably the biggest continuous footprint of urban poverty on earth.³⁹

Slum ecology, of course, revolves around the supply of settlement space. Winter King, in a recent study published in the *Harvard Law Review*, claims that 85 per cent of the urban residents of the developing world 'occupy property illegally'.⁴⁰ Indeterminacy of land titles and/or lax state ownership, in the last instance, are the cracks through which a vast humanity has poured into the cities. The modes of slum settlement vary across a huge spectrum, from highly disciplined land invasions in Mexico City and Lima to intricately organized (but often illegal) rental markets on the outskirts of Beijing, Karachi and Nairobi. Even in cities like Karachi, where the urban periphery is formally owned by the government, 'vast profits from land speculation . . . continue to accrue to the private sector at the expense of low-income households'.⁴¹ Indeed national and local political machines usually acquiesce in informal settlement (and illegal private speculation) as long as they can

³⁶ Salah El-Shakhs, 'Toward appropriate urban development policy in emerging mega-cities in Africa', in Rakodi, *Urban Challenge*, p. 516.

³⁷ *Daily Times of Nigeria*, 20 October 2003. Lagos has grown more explosively than any large Third World city except for Dhaka. In 1950 it had only 300,000 inhabitants but then grew almost 10 per cent per annum until 1980, when it slowed to about 6%—still a very rapid rate—during the years of structural readjustment.

³⁸ Amy Otchet, 'Lagos: the survival of the determined', *UNESCO Courier*, June 1999.

³⁹ *Slums*, p. 50.

⁴⁰ Winter King, 'Illegal Settlements and the Impact of Titling Programmes,' *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 44, no. 2, September 2003, p. 471.

⁴¹ United Nations, *Karachi, Population Growth and Policies in Megacities* series, New York 1988, p. 19.

control the political complexion of the slums and extract a regular flow of bribes or rents. Without formal land titles or home ownership, slum-dwellers are forced into quasi-feudal dependencies upon local officials and party bigshots. Disloyalty can mean eviction or even the razing of an entire district.

The provision of lifeline infrastructures, meanwhile, lags far behind the pace of urbanization, and peri-urban slum areas often have no formal utilities or sanitation provision whatsoever.⁴² Poor areas of Latin American cities in general have better utilities than South Asia which, in turn, usually have minimum urban services, like water and electricity, that many African slums lack. As in early Victorian London, the contamination of water by human and animal waste remains the cause of the chronic diarrhoeal diseases that kill at least two million urban babies and small children each year.⁴³ An estimated 57 per cent of urban Africans lack access to basic sanitation and in cities like Nairobi the poor must rely on 'flying toilets' (defecation into a plastic bag).⁴⁴ In Mumbai, meanwhile, the sanitation problem is defined by ratios of one toilet seat per 500 inhabitants in the poorer districts. Only 11 per cent of poor neighbourhoods in Manila and 18 per cent in Dhaka have formal means to dispose of sewage.⁴⁵ Quite apart from the incidence of the HIV/AIDS plague, the UN considers that two out of five African slum-dwellers live in a poverty that is literally 'life-threatening'.⁴⁶

The urban poor, meanwhile, are everywhere forced to settle on hazardous and otherwise unbuildable terrains—over-steep hillslopes, river banks and floodplains. Likewise they squat in the deadly shadows of refineries, chemical factories, toxic dumps, or in the margins of railroads and highways. Poverty, as a result, has 'constructed' an urban disaster problem of unprecedented frequency and scope, as typified by chronic flooding in Manila, Dhaka and Rio, pipeline conflagrations in Mexico City and Cubatão (Brazil), the Bhopal catastrophe in India, a munitions plant explosion in Lagos, and deadly mudslides in Caracas, La Paz and

⁴² The absence of infrastructure, however, does create innumerable niches for informal workers: selling water, carting nightsoil, recycling trash, delivering propane and so on.

⁴³ World Resources Institute, *World Resources: 1996–97*, Oxford 1996, p. 21.

⁴⁴ *Slums of the World*, p. 25.

⁴⁵ *Slums*, p. 99.

⁴⁶ *Slums of the World*, p. 12.

Tegucigalpa.⁴⁷ The disenfranchised communities of the urban poor, in addition, are vulnerable to sudden outbursts of state violence like the infamous 1990 bulldozing of the Maroko beach slum in Lagos ('an eyesore for the neighbouring community of Victoria Island, a fortress for the rich') or the 1995 demolition in freezing weather of the huge squatter town of Zhejiangcun on the edge of Beijing.⁴⁸

But slums, however deadly and insecure, have a brilliant future. The countryside will for a short period still contain the majority of the world's poor, but that doubtful title will pass to urban slums by 2035.⁴⁹ At least half of the coming Third World urban population explosion will be credited to the account of informal communities. Two billion slum dwellers by 2030 or 2040 is a monstrous, almost incomprehensible prospect, but urban poverty overlaps and exceeds the slums *per se*. Indeed, *Slums* underlines that in some cities the majority of the poor actually live outside the slum *stricto sensu*.⁵⁰ UN 'Urban Observatory' researchers warn, moreover, that by 2020 'urban poverty in the world could reach 45 to 50 per cent of the total population living in cities'.⁵¹

4. URBAN POVERTY'S 'BIG BANG'

After their mysterious laughter, they quickly changed the topic to other things. How were people back home surviving SAP?

Fidelis Balogun, *Adjusted Lives*, 1995

The evolution of the new urban poverty has been a non-linear historical process. The slow accretion of shanty towns to the shell of the city is punctuated by storms of poverty and sudden explosions of slum-building. In his collection of stories, *Adjusted Lives*, the Nigerian writer Fidelis Balogun describes the coming of the IMF-mandated Structural

⁴⁷ For an exemplary case-study, see Greg Bankoff, 'Constructing Vulnerability: The Historical, Natural and Social Generation of Flooding in Metropolitan Manila', *Disasters*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2003, pp. 224–38.

⁴⁸ Otchet, 'Lagos'; and Li Zhang, *Strangers in the City: Reconfigurations of Space, Power and Social Networks within China's Floating Population*, Stanford 2001; Alan Gilbert, *The Latin American City*, New York 1998, p. 16.

⁴⁹ Martin Ravallion, *On the urbanization of poverty*, World Bank paper, 2001.

⁵⁰ *Slums*, p. 28.

⁵¹ *Slums of the World*, p. 12.

Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the mid-1980s as the equivalent of a great natural catastrophe, destroying forever the old soul of Lagos and 're-enslaving' urban Nigerians.

The weird logic of this economic programme seemed to be that to restore life to the dying economy, every juice had first to be sapped out of the underprivileged majority of the citizens. The middle class rapidly disappeared, and the garbage heaps of the increasingly rich few became the food table of the multiplied population of abjectly poor. The brain drain to the oil-rich Arab countries and to the Western world became a flood.⁵²

Balogun's complaint about 'privatizing in full steam and getting more hungry by the day', or his enumeration of SAP's malevolent consequences, would be instantly familiar to survivors, not only of the other 30 African SAPs, but also to hundreds of millions of Asians and Latin Americans. The 1980s, when the IMF and World Bank used the leverage of debt to restructure the economies of most of the Third World, are the years when slums became an implacable future, not just for poor rural migrants, but also for millions of traditional urbanites, displaced or immiserated by the violence of 'adjustment'.

As *Slums* emphasizes, SAPs were 'deliberately anti-urban in nature' and designed to reverse any 'urban bias' that previously existed in welfare policies, fiscal structure or government investment.⁵³ Everywhere the IMF—acting as bailiff for the big banks and backed by the Reagan and Bush administrations—offered poor countries the same poisoned chalice of devaluation, privatization, removal of import controls and food subsidies, enforced cost-recovery in health and education, and ruthless downsizing of the public sector. (An infamous 1985 telegram from Treasury Secretary George Shultz to overseas USAID officials commanded: 'in most cases, public sector firms should be privatized'.)⁵⁴

⁵² Fidelis Odun Balogun, *Adjusted Lives: stories of structural adjustment*, Trenton, NJ 1995, p. 80.

⁵³ *The Challenge of Slums*, p. 30. 'Urban bias' theorists, like Michael Lipton who invented the term in 1977, argue that agriculture tends to be undercapitalized in developing countries, and cities relatively 'overurbanized', because fiscal and financial policies favour urban elites and distort investment flows. At the limit, cities are vampires of the countryside. See Lipton, *Why Poor People Stay Poor: A Study of Urban Bias in World Development*, Cambridge 1977.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Tony Killick, 'Twenty-five Years in Development: the Rise and Impending Decline of Market Solutions', *Development Policy Review*, vol. 4, 1986, p. 101.

At the same time, SAPs devastated rural smallholders by eliminating subsidies and pushing them out, 'sink or swim', into global commodity markets dominated by First World agribusiness.⁵⁵

As Ha-Joon Chang points out, SAPs hypocritically 'kicked away the ladder' (i.e., protectionist tariffs and subsidies) that the OECD nations historically employed in their own climb from agriculture to urban high-value goods and services.⁵⁶ *Slums* makes the same point when it argues that the 'main single cause of increases in poverty and inequality during the 1980s and 1990s was the retreat of the state'. In addition to the direct SAP-enforced reductions in public-sector spending and ownership, the UN authors stress the more subtle diminution of state capacity that has resulted from 'subsidiarity': the devolution of powers to lower echelons of government and, especially, NGOs, linked directly to major international aid agencies.

The whole, apparently decentralized structure is foreign to the notion of national representative government that has served the developed world well, while it is very amenable to the operations of a global hegemony. The dominant international perspective [i.e., Washington's] becomes the de facto paradigm for development, so that the whole world rapidly becomes unified in the broad direction of what is supported by donors and international organizations.⁵⁷

Urban Africa and Latin America were the hardest hit by the artificial depression engineered by the IMF and the White House. Indeed, in many countries, the economic impact of SAPs during the 1980s, in tandem with protracted drought, rising oil prices, soaring interest rates and falling commodity prices, was more severe and long-lasting than the Great Depression.

⁵⁵ Deborah Bryceson, 'Disappearing Peasantries? Rural Labour Redundancy in the Neoliberal Era and Beyond', in Bryceson, Cristóbal Kay and Jos Mooij, eds, *Disappearing Peasantries? Rural Labour in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, London 2000, p. 304–5.

⁵⁶ Ha-Joon Chang, 'Kicking Away the Ladder: Infant Industry Promotion in Historical Perspective', *Oxford Development Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2003, p. 21. 'Per capita income in developing countries grew at 3 per cent per annum between 1960 and 1980, but at only about 1.5 per cent between 1980 and 2000... Neoliberal economists are therefore faced with a paradox here. The developing countries grew much faster when they used "bad" policies during 1960–80 than when they used "good" (or least "better") policies during the following two decades.' (p. 28).

⁵⁷ *Slums*, p. 48.

The balance-sheet of structural adjustment in Africa, reviewed by Carole Rakodi, includes capital flight, collapse of manufactures, marginal or negative increase in export incomes, drastic cutbacks in urban public services, soaring prices and a steep decline in real wages.⁵⁸ In Kinshasa ('an aberration or rather a sign of things to come?') *assainissement* wiped out the civil servant middle class and produced an 'unbelievable decline in real wages' that, in turn, sponsored a nightmarish rise in crime and predatory gangs.⁵⁹ In Dar es Salaam, public service expenditure per person fell 10 per cent per year during the 1980s: a virtual demolition of the local state.⁶⁰ In Khartoum, liberalization and structural adjustment, according to local researchers, manufactured 1.1 million 'new poor': 'mostly drawn from the salaried groups or public sector employees'.⁶¹ In Abidjan, one of the few tropical African cities with an important manufacturing sector and modern urban services, submission to the SAP regime punctually led to deindustrialization, the collapse of construction, and a rapid deterioration in public transit and sanitation.⁶² In Balogun's Nigeria extreme poverty, increasingly urbanized in Lagos, Ibadan and other cities, metastatized from 28 per cent in 1980 to 66 per cent in 1996. 'GNP per capita, at about \$260 today,' the World Bank reports, 'is below the level at independence 40 years ago and below the \$370 level attained in 1985.'⁶³

In Latin America, SAPs (often implemented by military dictatorships) destabilized rural economies while savaging urban employment and housing. In 1970, Guevarist 'foco' theories of rural insurgency still conformed to a continental reality where the poverty of the countryside (75 million poor) overshadowed that of the cities (44 million poor). By the end of the 1980s, however, the vast majority of the poor (115 million in 1990) were living in urban *colonias* and *villas miseria* rather than farms or villages (80 million).⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Carole Rakodi, 'Global Forces, Urban Change, and Urban Management in Africa', in Rakodi, *Urban Challenge*, pp. 50, 60–1.

⁵⁹ Piermay, 'Kinshasa', p. 235–6; 'Megacities', *Time*, 11 January 1993, p. 26.

⁶⁰ Michael Mattingly, 'The Role of the Government of Urban Areas in the Creation of Urban Poverty', in Sue Jones and Nici Nelson, eds, *Urban Poverty in Africa*, London 1999, p. 21.

⁶¹ Adil Ahmad and Ata El-Battani, 'Poverty in Khartoum', *Environment and Urbanization*, vol. 7, no. 2, October 1995, p. 205.

⁶² Alain Dubresson, 'Abidjan', in Rakodi, *Urban Challenge*, pp. 261–3.

⁶³ World Bank, *Nigeria: Country Brief*, September 2003.

⁶⁴ UN, *World Urbanization Prospects*, p. 12.

Urban inequality, meanwhile, exploded. In Santiago, the Pinochet dictatorship bulldozed shanty towns and evicted formerly radical squatters: forcing poor families to become *allegados*, doubled or even tripled-up in the same rented dwelling. In Buenos Aires, the richest decile's share of income increased from 10 times that of the poorest in 1984 to 23 times in 1989.⁶⁵ In Lima, where the value of the minimum wage fell by 83 per cent during the IMF recession, the percentage of households living below the poverty threshold increased from 17 percent in 1985 to 44 per cent in 1990.⁶⁶ In Rio de Janeiro, inequality as measured in classical Gini coefficients soared from 0.58 in 1981 to 0.67 in 1989.⁶⁷ Indeed, throughout Latin America, the 1980s deepened the canyons and elevated the peaks of the world's most extreme social topography. (According to a 2003 World Bank report, Gini coefficients are 10 points higher in Latin America than Asia; 17.5 points higher than the OECD, and 20.4 points higher than Eastern Europe.)⁶⁸

Throughout the Third World, the economic shocks of the 1980s forced individuals to regroup around the pooled resources of households and, especially, the survival skills and desperate ingenuity of women. In China and the industrializing cities of Southeast Asia, millions of young women indentured themselves to assembly lines and factory squalor. In Africa and most of Latin America (Mexico's northern border cities excepted), this option did not exist. Instead, deindustrialization and the decimation of male formal-sector jobs compelled women to improvise new livelihoods as piece workers, liquor sellers, street vendors, cleaners, washers, ragpickers, nannies and prostitutes. In Latin America, where urban women's labour-force participation had always been lower than in other continents, the surge of women into tertiary informal activities during the 1980s was especially dramatic.⁶⁹ In Africa, where the icons of the informal sector are women running shebeens or hawking produce, Christian Rogerson reminds us that most informal women are not

⁶⁵ Luis Amstein, 'Buenos Aires: a case of deepening social polarization', in Gilbert, *Mega-City in Latin America*, p. 139.

⁶⁶ Gustavo Riofrío, 'Lima: Mega-city and mega-problem', in Gilbert, *Mega-City in Latin America*, p. 159; and Gilbert, *Latin American City*, p. 73.

⁶⁷ Hamilton Tolosa, 'Rio de Janeiro: Urban expansion and structural change', in Gilbert, *Mega-City in Latin America*, p. 211.

⁶⁸ World Bank, *Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean*, New York 2003.

⁶⁹ Orlandina de Oliveira and Bryan Roberts, 'The Many Roles of the Informal Sector in Development', in Cathy Rakowski, ed., *Contrapunto: the Informal Sector Debate in Latin America*, Albany 1994, pp. 64–8.

actually self-employed or economically independent, but work for someone else.⁷⁰ (These ubiquitous and vicious networks of micro-exploitation, of the poor exploiting the very poor, are usually glossed over in accounts of the informal sector.)

Urban poverty was also massively feminized in the ex-Comecon countries after capitalist 'liberation' in 1989. In the early 1990s extreme poverty in the former 'transitional countries' (as the UN calls them) soared from 14 million to 168 million: a mass pauperization almost without precedent in history.⁷¹ If, on a global balance-sheet, this economic catastrophe was partially offset by the much-praised success of China in raising incomes in its coastal cities, China's market 'miracle' was purchased by 'an enormous increase in wage inequality among urban workers . . . during the period 1988 to 1999.' Women and minorities were especially disadvantaged.⁷²

In theory, of course, the 1990s should have righted the wrongs of the 1980s and allowed Third World cities to regain lost ground and bridge the chasms of inequality created by SAPs. The pain of adjustment should have been followed by the analgesic of globalization. Indeed the 1990s, as *Slums* wryly notes, were the first decade in which global urban development took place within almost utopian parameters of neoclassical market freedom.

During the 1990s, trade continued to expand at an almost unprecedented rate, no-go areas opened up and military expenditures decreased. . . . All the basic inputs to production became cheaper, as interest rates fell rapidly along with the price of basic commodities. Capital flows were increasingly unfettered by national controls and could move rapidly to the most productive areas. Under what were almost perfect economic conditions according to the dominant neoliberal economic doctrine, one might have imagined that the decade would have been one of unrivalled prosperity and social justice.⁷³

⁷⁰ Christian Rogerson, 'Globalization or informalization? African urban economies in the 1990s', in Rakodi, *Urban Challenge*, p. 348

⁷¹ *Slums*, p. 2.

⁷² Albert Park et al., 'The Growth of Wage Inequality in Urban China, 1988 to 1999', World Bank working paper, February 2003, p. 27 (quote); and John Knight and Linda Song, 'Increasing urban wage inequality in China', *Economics of Transition*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2003, p. 616 (discrimination).

⁷³ *Slums*, p. 34.

In the event, however, urban poverty continued its relentless accumulation and 'the gap between poor and rich countries increased, just as it had done for the previous 20 years and, in most countries, income inequality increased or, at best, stabilized.' Global inequality, as measured by World Bank economists, reached an incredible Gini coefficient level of 0.67 by the end of the century. This was mathematically equivalent to a situation where the poorest two-thirds of the world receive zero income; and the top third, everything.⁷⁴

5. A SURPLUS HUMANITY?

We shove our way about next to City, holding on to it by its thousand survival cracks . . .

Patrick Chamoiseau, *Texaco* (1997)

The brutal tectonics of neoliberal globalization since 1978 are analogous to the catastrophic processes that shaped a 'third world' in the first place, during the era of late Victorian imperialism (1870–1900). In the latter case, the forcible incorporation into the world market of the great subsistence peasantries of Asia and Africa entailed the famine deaths of millions and the uprooting of tens of millions more from traditional tenures. The end result, in Latin America as well, was rural 'semi-proletarianization': the creation of a huge global class of immiserated semi-peasants and farm labourers lacking existential security of subsistence.⁷⁵ (As a result, the twentieth century became an age, not of urban revolutions as classical Marxism had imagined, but of epochal rural uprisings and peasant-based wars of national liberation.) Structural adjustment, it would appear, has recently worked an equally fundamental reshaping of human futures. As the authors of *Slums* conclude: 'instead of being a focus for growth and prosperity, the cities have become a dumping ground for a surplus population working in unskilled, unprotected and low-wage informal service industries and trade.' 'The rise of [this] informal sector,' they declare bluntly, 'is . . . a direct result of liberalization.'⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Shaohua Chen and Martin Ravallion, *How Did the World's Poorest Fare in the 1990s?*, World Bank paper, 2000.

⁷⁵ See my *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World*, London 2001, especially pp. 206–9.

⁷⁶ *Slums*, pp. 40, 46.

Indeed, the global informal working class (overlapping but non-identical with the slum population) is almost one billion strong: making it the fastest growing, and most unprecedented, social class on earth. Since anthropologist Keith Hart, working in Accra, first broached the concept of an 'informal sector' in 1973, a huge literature (mostly failing to distinguish micro-accumulation from sub-subsistence) has wrestled with the formidable theoretical and empirical problems involved in studying the survival strategies of the urban poor.⁷⁷ There is a base consensus, however, that the 1980s' crisis inverted the relative structural positions of the formal and informal sectors: promoting informal survivalism as the new primary mode of livelihood in a majority of Third World cities.

Alejandro Portes and Kelly Hoffman have recently evaluated the overall impact of SAPs and liberalization upon Latin American urban class structures since the 1970s. Congruent with UN conclusions, they find that both state employees and the formal proletariat have declined in every country of the region since the 1970s. In contrast, the informal sector of the economy, along with general social inequality, has dramatically expanded. Unlike some researchers, they make a crucial distinction between an informal petty bourgeoisie ('the sum of owners of microenterprises, employing less than five workers, plus own-account professionals and technicians') and the informal proletariat ('the sum of own-account workers minus professionals and technicians, domestic servants, and paid and unpaid workers in microenterprises'). They demonstrate that this former stratum, the 'microentrepreneurs' so beloved in North American business schools, are often displaced public-sector professionals or laid-off skilled workers. Since the 1980s, they have grown from about 5 to 10 per cent of the economically active urban population: a trend reflecting 'the forced entrepreneurialism foisted on former salaried employees by the decline of formal sector employment'.⁷⁸

Overall, according to *Slums*, informal workers are about two-fifths of the economically active population of the developing world.⁷⁹ According to researchers at the Inter-American Development Bank, the informal

⁷⁷ Keith Hart, 'Informal income opportunities and urban employment in Ghana', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 11, 1973, pp. 61–89.

⁷⁸ Alejandro Portes and Kelly Hoffman, 'Latin American Class Structures. Their Composition and Change during the Neoliberal Era', *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2003, p. 55.

⁷⁹ *Slums*, p. 60.

economy currently employs 57 per cent of the Latin American workforce and supplies four out of five new 'jobs'.⁸⁰ Other sources claim that more than half of urban Indonesians and 65 per cent of residents of Dhaka subsist in the informal sector.⁸¹ *Slums* likewise cites research finding that informal economic activity accounts for 33 to 40 per cent of urban employment in Asia, 60 to 75 per cent in Central America and 60 per cent in Africa.⁸² Indeed, in sub-Saharan cities 'formal job' creation has virtually ceased to exist. An ILO study of Zimbabwe's urban labour markets under 'stagflationary' structural adjustment in the early 1990s found that the formal sector was creating only 10,000 jobs per year in face of an urban workforce increasing by more than 300,000 per annum.⁸³ *Slums* similarly estimates that fully 90 per cent of urban Africa's new jobs over the next decade will somehow come from the informal sector.⁸⁴

The pundits of bootstrap capitalism, like the irrepressible Hernando de Soto, may see this enormous population of marginalized labourers, redundant civil servants and ex-peasants as actually a frenzied beehive of ambitious entrepreneurs yearning for formal property rights and unregulated competitive space, but it makes more obvious sense to consider most informal workers as the 'active' unemployed, who have no choice but to subsist by some means or starve.⁸⁵ The world's estimated 100 million street kids are not likely—apologies to Señor de Soto—to start issuing IPOs or selling chewing-gum futures.⁸⁶ Nor will most of

⁸⁰ Cited in the *Economist*, 21 March 1998, p. 37.

⁸¹ Dennis Rondinelli and John Kasarda, 'Job Creation Needs in Third World Cities', in Kasarda and Allan Parnell, eds, *Third World Cities: Problems, policies and prospects*, Newbury Park, CA 1993, pp. 106–7.

⁸² *Slums*, p. 103.

⁸³ Guy Mhone, 'The impact of structural adjustment on the urban informal sector in Zimbabwe', *Issues in Development* discussion paper no. 2, International Labour Office, Geneva n.d., p. 19.

⁸⁴ *Slums*, p. 104.

⁸⁵ Orlandina de Oliveira and Bryan Roberts rightly emphasize that the bottom strata of the urban labour-force should be identified 'not simply by occupational titles or whether the job was formal or informal, but by the household strategy for obtaining an income'. The mass of the urban poor can only exist by 'income pooling, sharing housing, food and other resources' either with kin or *landsmen*. ('Urban Development and Social Inequality in Latin America', in Gugler, *Cities in the Developing World*, p. 290.)

⁸⁶ Statistic on street kids: *Natural History*, July 1997, p. 4.

China's 70 million 'floating workers', living furtively on the urban periphery, eventually capitalize themselves as small subcontractors or integrate into the formal urban working class. And the informal working class—everywhere subject to micro- and macro-exploitation—is almost universally deprived of protection by labour laws and standards.

Moreover, as Alain Dubresson argues in the case of Abidjan, 'the dynamism of crafts and small-scale trade depends largely on demand from the wage sector'. He warns against the 'illusion' cultivated by the ILO and World Bank that 'the informal sector can efficiently replace the formal sector and promote an accumulation process sufficient for a city with more than 2.5 million inhabitants'.⁸⁷ His warning is echoed by Christian Rogerson who, distinguishing (*à la Portes and Hoffman*) 'survivalist' from 'growth' micro-enterprises, writes of the former: 'generally speaking, the incomes generated from these enterprises, the majority of which tend to be run by women, usually fall short of even a minimum living standard and involve little capital investment, virtually no skills training, and only constrained opportunities for expansion into a viable business'. With even formal-sector urban wages in Africa so low that economists can't figure out how workers survive (the so-called 'wage puzzle'), the informal tertiary sector has become an arena of extreme Darwinian competition amongst the poor. Rogerson cites the examples of Zimbabwe and South Africa where female-controlled informal niches like shebeens and *spazas* are now drastically overcrowded and plagued by collapsing profitability.⁸⁸

The real macroeconomic trend of informal labour, in other words, is the reproduction of absolute poverty. But if the informal proletariat is not the pettiest of petty bourgeoisies, neither is it a 'labour reserve army' or a 'lumpen proletariat' in any obsolete nineteenth-century sense. Part of it, to be sure, is a stealth workforce for the formal economy and numerous studies have exposed how the subcontracting networks of WalMart and other mega-companies extend deep into the misery of the *colonias* and *chawls*. But at the end of the day, a majority of urban slum-dwellers are truly and radically homeless in the contemporary international economy.

⁸⁷ Dubresson, 'Abidjan', p. 263

⁸⁸ Rogerson, 'Globalization or informalization?', p. 347–51.

Slums, of course, originate in the global countryside where, as Deborah Bryceson reminds us, unequal competition with large-scale agro-industry is tearing traditional rural society 'apart at the seams'.⁸⁹ As rural areas lose their 'storage capacity', slums take their place, and urban 'involution' replaces rural involution as a sink for surplus labour which can only keep pace with subsistence by ever more heroic feats of self-exploitation and the further competitive subdivision of already densely filled survival niches.⁹⁰ 'Modernization', 'Development' and, now, the unfettered 'Market' have had their day. The labour-power of a billion people has been expelled from the world system, and who can imagine any plausible scenario, under neoliberal auspices, that would reintegrate them as productive workers or mass consumers?

6. MARX AND THE HOLY GHOST

[The Lord says:] The time will come when the poor man will say that he has nothing to eat and work will be shut down . . . That is going to cause the poor man to go to these places and break in to get food. This will cause the rich man to come out with his gun to make war with the labouring man. . . . blood will be in the streets like an outpouring rain from heaven.

A prophecy from the 1906 'Azusa Street Awakening'

The late capitalist triage of humanity, then, has already taken place. The global growth of a vast informal proletariat, moreover, is a wholly original structural development unforeseen by either classical Marxism or modernization pundits. *Slums* indeed challenges social theory to grasp the novelty of a true global residuum lacking the strategic economic power of socialized labor, but massively concentrated in a shanty-town world encircling the fortified enclaves of the urban rich.

Tendencies toward urban involution, of course, existed during the nineteenth century. The European industrial revolutions were incapable of

⁸⁹ Bryceson, 'Disappearing Peasantries', pp. 307–8.

⁹⁰ In Clifford Geertz's original, inimitable definition, 'involution' is 'an overdriving of an established form in such a way that it becomes rigid through an inward over-elaboration of detail'. (*Agricultural involution: Social development and economic change in two Indonesian towns*, Chicago 1963, p. 82.) More prosaically, 'involution', agricultural or urban, can be described as spiralling labour self-exploitation (other factors fixed) which continues, despite rapidly diminishing returns, as long as any return or increment is produced.

absorbing the entire supply of displaced rural labour, especially after continental agriculture was exposed to the devastating competition of the North American prairies from the 1870s. But mass immigration to the settler societies of the Americas and Oceania, as well as Siberia, provided a dynamic safety-valve that prevented the rise of mega-Dublins as well as the spread of the kind of underclass anarchism that had taken root in the most immiserated parts of Southern Europe. Today surplus labour, by contrast, faces unprecedented barriers—a literal ‘great wall’ of high-tech border enforcement—blocking large-scale migration to the rich countries. Likewise, controversial population resettlement programmes in ‘frontier’ regions like Amazonia, Tibet, Kalimantan and Irian Jaya produce environmental devastation and ethnic conflict without substantially reducing urban poverty in Brazil, China and Indonesia.

Thus only the slum remains as a fully franchised solution to the problem of warehousing the twenty-first century’s surplus humanity. But aren’t the great slums, as a terrified Victorian bourgeoisie once imagined, volcanoes waiting to erupt? Or does ruthless Darwinian competition, as increasing numbers of poor people compete for the same informal scraps, ensure self-consuming communal violence as yet the highest form of urban involution? To what extent does an informal proletariat possess that most potent of Marxist talismans: ‘historical agency’? Can disincorporated labour be reincorporated in a global emancipatory project? Or is the sociology of protest in the immiserated megacity a regression to the pre-industrial urban mob, episodically explosive during consumption crises, but otherwise easily managed by clientelism, populist spectacle and appeals to ethnic unity? Or is some new, unexpected historical subject, à la Hardt and Negri, slouching toward the supercity?

In truth, the current literature on poverty and urban protest offers few answers to such large-scale questions. Some researchers, for example, would question whether the ethnically diverse slum poor or economically heterogeneous informal workers even constitute a meaningful ‘class in itself’, much less a potentially activist ‘class for itself’. Surely, the informal proletariat bears ‘radical chains’ in the Marxist sense of having little or no vested interest in the preservation of the existing mode of production. But because uprooted rural migrants and informal workers have been largely dispossessed of fungible labour-power, or reduced to domestic service in the houses of the rich, they have little access to the culture of collective labour or large-scale class struggle. Their social

stage, necessarily, must be the slum street or marketplace, not the factory or international assembly line.

Struggles of informal workers, as John Walton emphasizes in a recent review of research on social movements in poor cities, have tended, above all, to be episodic and discontinuous. They are also usually focused on immediate consumption issues: land invasions in search of affordable housing and riots against rising food or utility prices. In the past, at least, 'urban problems in developing societies have been more typically mediated by patron-client relations than by popular activism'.⁹¹ Since the debt crisis of the 1980s, neopopulist leaders in Latin America have had dramatic success in exploiting the desperate desire of the urban poor for more stable, predictable structures of daily life. Although Walton doesn't make the point explicitly, the urban informal sector has been ideologically promiscuous in its endorsement of populist saviours: in Peru rallying to Fujimori, but in Venezuela embracing Chávez.⁹² In Africa and South Asia, on the other hand, urban clientelism too often equates with the dominance of ethno-religious bigots and their nightmare ambitions of ethnic cleansing. Notorious examples include the anti-Muslim militias of the Oodua People's Congress in Lagos and the semi-fascist Shiv Sena movement in Bombay.⁹³

Will such 'eighteenth-century' sociologies of protest persist into the middle twenty-first century? The past is probably a poor guide to the future. History is not uniformitarian. The new urban world is evolving with extraordinary speed and often in unpredictable directions. Everywhere the continuous accumulation of poverty undermines existential security and poses even more extraordinary challenges to the economic ingenuity of the poor. Perhaps there is a tipping point at which the pollution, congestion, greed and violence of everyday urban life finally overwhelm the ad hoc civilities and survival networks of the slum. Certainly in the old

⁹¹ John Walton, 'Urban Conflict and Social Movements in Poor Countries: Theory and Evidence of Collective Action', paper to 'Cities in Transition Conference', Humboldt University, Berlin, July 1987.

⁹² Kurt Weyland, 'Neopopulism and Neoliberalism in Latin America: how much affinity?', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 6, 2003, pp. 1095–115.

⁹³ For a fascinating if frightening account of Shiv Sena's ascendancy in Bombay at the expense of older Communist and trade-union politics, see Thomas Hansen, *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay*, Princeton 2001. See also Veena Das, ed., *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, New York 1990.

rural world there were thresholds, often calibrated by famine, that passed directly to social eruption. But no one yet knows the social temperature at which the new cities of poverty spontaneously combust.

Indeed, for the moment at least, Marx has yielded the historical stage to Mohammed and the Holy Ghost. If God died in the cities of the industrial revolution, he has risen again in the postindustrial cities of the developing world. The contrast between the cultures of urban poverty in the two eras is extraordinary. As Hugh McLeod has shown in his magisterial study of Victorian working-class religion, Marx and Engels were largely accurate in their belief that urbanization was secularizing the working class. Although Glasgow and New York were partial exceptions, ‘the line of interpretation that associates working-class detachment from the church with growing class consciousness is in a sense uncontested’. If small churches and dissenting sects thrived in the slums, the great current was active or passive disbelief. Already by the 1880s, Berlin was scandalizing foreigners as ‘the most irreligious city in the world’ and in London, median adult church attendance in the proletarian East End and Docklands by 1902 was barely 12 per cent (and that mostly Catholic).⁹⁴ In Barcelona, of course, an anarchist working class sacked the churches during the *Semana Trágica*, while in the slums of St. Petersburg, Buenos Aires and even Tokyo, militant workers avidly embraced the new faiths of Darwin, Kropotkin and Marx.

Today, on the other hand, populist Islam and Pentecostal Christianity (and in Bombay, the cult of Shivaji) occupy a social space analogous to that of early twentieth-century socialism and anarchism. In Morocco, for instance, where half a million rural emigrants are absorbed into the teeming cities every year, and where half the population is under 25, Islamicist movements like ‘Justice and Welfare’, founded by Sheik Abdessalam Yassin, have become the real governments of the slums: organizing night schools, providing legal aid to victims of state abuse, buying medicine for the sick, subsidizing pilgrimages and paying for funerals. As Prime Minister Abderrahmane Youssoufi, the Socialist leader who was once exiled by the monarchy, recently admitted to Ignacio Ramonet, ‘We [the Left] have become embourgeoisified. We have cut ourselves off from the people. We need to reconquer the popular quarters. The Islamicists have

⁹⁴ Hugh McLeod, *Piety and Poverty: Working-Class Religion in Berlin, London and New York, 1870–1914*, New York 1996, pp. xxv, 6, 32.

seduced our natural electorate. They promise them heaven on earth.' An Islamicist leader, on the other hand, told Ramonet: 'confronted with the neglect of the state, and faced with the brutality of daily life, people discover, thanks to us, solidarity, self-help, fraternity. They understand that Islam is humanism.'⁹⁵

The counterpart of populist Islam in the slums of Latin America and much of sub-Saharan Africa is Pentecostalism. Christianity, of course, is now, in its majority, a non-Western religion (two-thirds of its adherents live outside Europe and North America), and Pentecostalism is its most dynamic missionary in cities of poverty. Indeed the historical specificity of Pentecostalism is that it is the first major world religion to have grown up almost entirely in the soil of the modern urban slum. With roots in early ecstatic Methodism and African-American spirituality, Pentecostalism 'awoke' when the Holy Ghost gave the gift of tongues to participants in an interracial prayer marathon in a poor neighbourhood of Los Angeles (Azusa Street) in 1906. Unified around spirit baptism, miracle healing, charismata and a premillennial belief in a coming world war of capital and labour, early American Pentecostalism—as religious historians have repeatedly noted—originated as a 'prophetic democracy' whose rural and urban constituencies overlapped, respectively, with those of Populism and the IWW.⁹⁶ Indeed, like Wobbly organizers, its early missionaries to Latin America and Africa 'lived often in extreme poverty, going out with little or no money, seldom knowing where they would spend the night, or how they would get their next meal.'⁹⁷ They also yielded nothing to the IWW in their vehement denunciations of the injustices of industrial capitalism and its inevitable destruction.

Syntomatically, the first Brazilian congregation, in an anarchist working-class district of São Paulo, was founded by an Italian artisan

⁹⁵ Ignacio Ramonet, 'Le Maroc indécis', *Le Monde diplomatique*, July 2000, pp. 12–13. Another former leftist told Ramonet: 'Nearly 65 per cent of the population lives under the poverty line. The people of the *bidonvilles* are entirely cut off from the elites. They see the elites the way they used to see the French.'

⁹⁶ In his controversial sociological interpretation of Pentecostalism, Robert Mapes Anderson claimed that 'its unconscious intent', like other millenarian movements, was actually 'revolutionary'. (*Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism*, Oxford 1979, p. 222.)

⁹⁷ Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited*, p. 77.

immigrant who had exchanged Malatesta for the Spirit in Chicago.⁹⁸ In South Africa and Rhodesia, Pentecostalism established its early footholds in the mining compounds and shanty towns; where, according to Jean Comaroff, 'it seemed to accord with indigenous notions of pragmatic spirit forces and to redress the depersonalization and powerlessness of the urban labour experience'.⁹⁹ Conceding a larger role to women than other Christian churches and immensely supportive of abstinence and frugality, Pentecostalism—as R. Andrew Chesnut discovered in the *baixadas* of Belém—has always had a particular attraction to 'the most immiserated stratum of the impoverished classes': abandoned wives, widows and single mothers.¹⁰⁰ Since 1970, and largely because of its appeal to slum women and its reputation for being colour-blind, it has been growing into what is arguably the largest self-organized movement of urban poor people on the planet.¹⁰¹

Although recent claims of 'over 533 million Pentecostal/charismatics in the world in 2002' are probably hyperbole, there may well be half that number. It is generally agreed that 10 per cent of Latin America is Pentecostal (about 40 million people) and that the movement has been the single most important cultural response to explosive and traumatic urbanization.¹⁰² As Pentecostalism has globalized, of course, it has

⁹⁸ R. Andrew Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil: The Pentecostal Boom and the Pathogens of Poverty*, New Brunswick 1997, p. 29. On the historical associations of Pentecostalism with anarchism in Brazil, see Paul Freston, 'Pentecostalism in Latin America: Characteristics and Controversies', *Social Compass*, vol. 45, no. 3, 1998, p. 342.

⁹⁹ David Maxwell, 'Historicizing Christian Independence: The Southern Africa Pentecostal Movement, c. 1908–60', *Journal of African History* 40, 1990, p. 249; and Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance*, Chicago 1985, p. 186.

¹⁰⁰ Chesnut, *Born Again*, p. 61. Indeed, Chesnut found that the Holy Ghost not only moved tongues but improved family budgets. 'By eliminating expenditures associated with the male prestige complex, Assemblianos were able to climb from the lower and middle ranks of poverty to the upper echelons, and some Quandangulares migrated from poverty . . . to the lower rungs of the middle class' p. 18.

¹⁰¹ 'In all of human history, no other non-political, non-militaristic, voluntary human movement has grown as rapidly as the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement in the last twenty years': Peter Wagner, foreword to Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, Grand Rapids 1997, p. xi.

¹⁰² The high estimate is from David Barret and Todd Johnson, 'Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission: 2001', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol. 25, no. 1, January 2001, p. 25. Synan says there were 217 million denominated Pentecostals in 1997 (*Holiness*, p. ix). On Latin America, compare Freston,

differentiated into distinct currents and sociologies. But if in Liberia, Mozambique and Guatemala, American-sponsored churches have been vectors of dictatorship and repression, and if some US congregations are now gentrified into the suburban mainstream of fundamentalism, the missionary tide of Pentecostalism in the Third World remains closer to the original millenarian spirit of Azusa Street.¹⁰³ Above all, as Chesnut found in Brazil, 'Pentecostalism . . . remains a religion of the informal periphery' (and in Belém, in particular, 'the poorest of the poor'). In Peru, where Pentecostalism is growing almost exponentially in the vast *barriadas* of Lima, Jefrey Gamarra contends that the growth of the sects and of the informal economy 'are a consequence of and a response to each other'.¹⁰⁴ Paul Freston adds that it 'is the first autonomous mass religion in Latin America . . . Leaders may not be democratic, but they come from the same social class'.¹⁰⁵

In contrast to populist Islam, which emphasizes civilizational continuity and the trans-class solidarity of faith, Pentecostalism, in the tradition of its African-American origins, retains a fundamentally exilic identity. Although, like Islam in the slums, it efficiently correlates itself to the survival needs of the informal working class (organizing self-help networks for poor women; offering faith healing as para-medicine; providing recovery from alcoholism and addiction; insulating children from the temptations of the street; and so on), its ultimate premise is that the urban world is corrupt, unjust and unreformable. Whether, as Jean Comaroff has argued in her book on African Zionist churches (many of which are now Pentecostal), this religion of 'the marginalized in the

'Pentecostalism', p. 337; Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited*; and David Martin, 'Evangelical and Charismatic Christianity in Latin America', in Karla Poewe, ed., *Charismatic Christianity as a Global Culture*, Columbia 1994, pp. 74–5.

¹⁰³ See Paul Gifford's brilliant *Christianity and Politics in Doe's Liberia*, Cambridge 1993. Also Peter Walshe, *Prophetic Christianity and the Liberation Movement in South Africa*, Pietermaritzburg 1995, especially pp. 110–1.

¹⁰⁴ Jefrey Gamarra, 'Conflict, Post-Conflict and Religion: Andean Responses to New Religious Movements', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 26, no. 2, June 2000, p. 272. Andres Tapia quotes the Peruvian theologian Samuel Escobar who sees Sendero Luminoso and the Pentecostals as 'flip sides of the same coin'—'both were seeking a powerful break with injustices, only the means were different.' 'With Shining Path's decline, Pentecostalism has emerged as the winner for the souls of poor Peruvians.' ('In the Ashes of the Shining Path', *Pacific News Service*, 14 February 1996).

¹⁰⁵ Freston, 'Pentecostalism', p. 352.

shantytowns of neocolonial modernity' is actually a 'more radical' resistance than 'participation in formal politics or labour unions', remains to be seen.¹⁰⁶ But, with the Left still largely missing from the slum, the eschatology of Pentecostalism admirably refuses the inhuman destiny of the Third World city that *Slums* warns about. It also sanctifies those who, in every structural and existential sense, truly live in exile.

¹⁰⁶ Comaroff, *Body of Power*, pp. 259–63.

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BENNY MORRIS

*Few figures in Israeli public life have done more to recover the historical truth of the fate of the Palestinians at the hands of the Zionist movement than Benny Morris, interviewed below. For several decades one of the leading historians of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Morris began his career—at a time when such research was still all but completely taboo in his own community—by starting to lift the veil on the ethnic cleansings on which the state of Israel was founded, in his ground-breaking work *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (1988). Undeterred by the ensuing odium, he continued his investigations with notable courage and independence of mind, going on to produce an iconoclastic study of Israel's subsequent border wars (1993), and unearthing further damning evidence of the premeditated expulsion of Palestinian populations by the leadership of the Yishuv ('Revisiting the Palestinian exodus of 1948', in Rogan and Shlaim, eds, *The War for Palestine*, 2001). Morris is also the author of a major synthesis of the story of Zionist colonization and Arab reactions to it, from Ottoman times to the present: *Righteous Victims* (1999). The hallmark of Morris's work has been a tough-minded realism—the inclination of a former paratrooper for the IDF to call a spade a spade, whatever discomfort it might cause his co-nationals.*

These are the qualities that make the interview below, first published in the liberal daily Haaretz on 8 January 2004, under the title 'Survival of the Fittest', a document of unusual significance in the modern history of Zionism—and reproduced here for that reason. To his shocked interlocutor, Morris lays out two unpalatable truths: that the Zionist project could only be realized by deliberate ethnic cleansing; and that, once it was embarked upon, the only reasons for stopping short of the complete elimination of the Arab population from Palestine were purely temporary and tactical ones. It is letting the second of these cats out of the bag that has led to most uproar among conventional opponents of the Likud and Labour establishments. Arguments for the wholesale ejection of the Palestinians from the Promised Land have long been openly expressed on the right of the Israeli spectrum, while more sotto voce justifications of ethnic transfers—typically invoking the expulsion of Ionian Greeks or Sudeten Germans as commendable examples—have freely circulated in labour and liberal circles, in Israel and the diaspora. But Morris's forthright judgement that Ben-Gurion made a fatal mistake in not also clearing the future West Bank of its Arab inhabitants comes with the

unique authority of one still at work revealing hidden atrocities from the War of Independence. The same rigour that he has brought to Zionist war crimes he now brings to the underlying logic of Zionism—left or right.

In doing so, Morris—invoking Camus—here places himself squarely on the side of his community, whatever the disasters it has inflicted on the Palestinians that he has unsparingly recorded. In accompanying his arguments about the predicaments of Israel with the crudest stereotypes of Islamic and Arab barbarianism, Morris gave his critics an easy stick to beat him with. His comparison of the fate of the Palestinians with the positive example of the elimination of the native populations needed to build the United States could hardly be welcome to American Zionism, and Morris has been obliged to express his regrets on this point. Within Israel too, hubbub over such remarks has allowed attention to be deflected from the central issue raised by Morris's outspoken intervention.

For what it does is strike at the heart of the self-serving recipes for peace harboured by the overwhelming majority of Israeli opponents of Likud and Labour alike: the idea that a 'final settlement' which gives the Palestinians 18 per cent or less of the land they once inhabited is morally or politically defensible. Only on the cynically pragmatic grounds that the Jewish population of Israel will never yield a square metre of what it has taken, so the Palestinians should accept whatever remnant they can get, could such a solution be justified. But there is always a realism colder even than this one. On the same premises, the logic of Morris's position is impregnable. If the Palestinians can be battered down to a point where they are made to crouch helplessly within less than a fifth of the country, why not finish them off and expel the residue altogether? The merit of Morris's candour is to make it plain that the 'peace process' in all its guises—as multifarious as they are monotonous: Oslo, Camp David, Taba, Road Map or Geneva—is little more than war against the Palestinians by other means. The lesson of the interview is crystal clear. There are only two acceptable solutions to the Palestinian conflict: an equal division of the land between two communities that are now of roughly equal size, or the creation of a single state embracing both.

BENNY MORRIS

ON ETHNIC CLEANSING

Introduction and Interview by Ari Shavit

BENNY MORRIS says he was always a Zionist. People were mistaken when they labelled him a post-Zionist, when they thought that his historical study on the birth of the Palestinian refugee problem was intended to undercut the Zionist enterprise. Nonsense, Morris says, that's completely unfounded. Some readers simply misread the book. They didn't read it with the same detachment, the same moral neutrality, with which it was written. So they came to the mistaken conclusion that when Morris describes the cruellest deeds that the Zionist movement perpetrated in 1948 he is actually being condemnatory, that when he describes the large-scale expulsion operations he is being denunciatory. They did not conceive that the great documenter of the sins of Zionism in fact identifies with those sins. That he thinks some of them, at least, were unavoidable. Two years ago, different voices started to be heard. The historian who was considered a radical leftist suddenly maintained that Israel had no-one to talk to. The researcher who was accused of being an Israel-hater (and was boycotted by the Israeli academic establishment) began to publish articles in favour of Israel in the British newspaper, the *Guardian*.

Whereas citizen Morris turned out to be a not completely snow-white dove, historian Morris continued to work on the Hebrew translation of his massive work *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881–2001*, which was written in the old, peace-pursuing style. And at the same time historian Morris completed the new version of his book on the refugee problem, which is going to strengthen the hands of those who abominate Israel. So that in the past two years citizen Morris and historian Morris worked as though there were no

connection between them, as though one was trying to save what the other insisted on eradicating.

Both books will appear in the coming month. The book on the history of the Zionist-Arab conflict will be published in Hebrew by Am Oved in Tel Aviv, while the Cambridge University Press will publish *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (it originally appeared, under the CUP imprint, in 1988). That book describes in chilling detail the atrocities of the Nakba. Isn't Morris ever frightened at the present-day political implications of his historical study? Isn't he fearful that he has contributed to Israel becoming an almost pariah state? After a few moments of evasion, Morris admits that he is. Sometimes he really is frightened. Sometimes he asks himself what he has wrought.

He is short, plump, and very intense. The son of immigrants from England, he was born in Kibbutz Ein Hahoresh and was a member of the left-wing Hashomer Hatza'ir youth movement. In the past, he was a reporter for the *Jerusalem Post* and refused to do military service in the territories. He is now a professor of History at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Be'er Sheva. But sitting in an armchair in his Jerusalem apartment, he does not don the mantle of the cautious academic. Far from it: Morris spews out his words, rapidly and energetically, sometimes spilling over into English. He doesn't think twice before firing off the sharpest, most shocking statements, which are anything but politically correct. He describes horrific war crimes offhandedly, paints apocalyptic visions with a smile on his lips. He gives the observer the feeling that this agitated individual, who with his own hands opened the Zionist Pandora's box, is still having difficulty coping with what he found in it, still finding it hard to deal with the internal contradictions that are his lot and the lot of us all. Rape, massacre, transfer.

Benny Morris, in the month ahead the new version of your book on the birth of the Palestinian refugee problem is due to be published. Who will be less pleased with the book—the Israelis or the Palestinians?

The revised book is a double-edged sword. It is based on many documents that were not available to me when I wrote the original book, most of them from the Israel Defense Forces Archives. What the new material shows is that there were far more Israeli acts of massacre than I had

previously thought. To my surprise, there were also many cases of rape. In the months of April–May 1948, units of the Haganah [the pre-state defense force that was the precursor of the IDF] were given operational orders that stated explicitly that they were to uproot the villagers, expel them and destroy the villages themselves.

At the same time, it turns out that there was a series of orders issued by the Arab Higher Committee and by the Palestinian intermediate levels to remove children, women and the elderly from the villages. So that on the one hand, the book reinforces the accusation against the Zionist side, but on the other hand it also proves that many of those who left the villages did so with the encouragement of the Palestinian leadership itself.

According to your new findings, how many cases of Israeli rape were there in 1948?

About a dozen. In Acre four soldiers raped a girl and murdered her and her father. In Jaffa, soldiers of the Kiryati Brigade raped one girl and tried to rape several more. At Hunin, which is in the Galilee, two girls were raped and then murdered. There were one or two cases of rape at Tantura, south of Haifa. There was one case of rape at Qula, in the centre of the country. At the village of Abu Shusha, near Kibbutz Gezer [in the Ramle area] there were four female prisoners, one of whom was raped a number of times. And there were other cases. Usually more than one soldier was involved. Usually there were one or two Palestinian girls. In a large proportion of the cases the event ended with murder. Because neither the victims nor the rapists liked to report these events, we have to assume that the dozen cases of rape that were reported, which I found, are not the whole story. They are just the tip of the iceberg.

According to your findings, how many acts of Israeli massacre were perpetrated in 1948?

Twenty-four. In some cases four or five people were executed, in others the numbers were 70, 80, 100. There was also a great deal of arbitrary killing. Two old men are spotted walking in a field—they are shot. A woman is found in an abandoned village—she is shot. There are cases such as the village of al-Dawayima [in the Hebron region], in which a column entered the village with all guns blazing and killed anything that moved.

The worst cases were Saliha (70–80 killed), Deir Yassin (100–110), Lod (250), al-Dawayima (hundreds) and perhaps Abu Shusha (70). There is no unequivocal proof of a large-scale massacre at Tantura, but war crimes were perpetrated there. At Jaffa there was a massacre about which nothing had been known until now. The same at Arab al Muwassi, in the north. About half of the acts of massacre were part of Operation Hiram [in the north, in October 1948]: at Safsaf, Saliha, Jish, Eilaboun, Arab al Muwasi, Deir al Asad, Majdal Krum, Sasa. In Operation Hiram there was an unusually high concentration of executions of people against a wall or next to a well in an orderly fashion.

That can't be chance. It's a pattern. Apparently, various officers who took part in the operation understood that the expulsion order they received permitted them to do these deeds in order to encourage the population to take to the roads. The fact is that no-one was punished for these acts of murder. Ben-Gurion silenced the matter. He covered up for the officers who did the massacres.

What you are telling me here, as though by the way, is that in Operation Hiram there was a comprehensive and explicit expulsion order. Is that right?

Yes. One of the revelations in the book is that on October 31, 1948, the commander of the Northern Front, Moshe Carmel, issued an order in writing to his units to expedite the removal of the Arab population. Carmel took this action immediately after a visit by Ben-Gurion to the Northern Command in Nazareth. There is no doubt in my mind that this order originated with Ben-Gurion. Just as the expulsion order for the city of Lod, which was signed by Yitzhak Rabin, was issued immediately after Ben-Gurion visited the headquarters of Operation Dani [July 1948].

Are you saying that Ben-Gurion was personally responsible for a deliberate and systematic policy of mass expulsion?

From April 1948, Ben-Gurion is projecting a message of transfer. There is no explicit order of his in writing, there is no orderly comprehensive policy, but there is an atmosphere of [population] transfer. The transfer idea is in the air. The entire leadership understands that this is the idea. The officer corps understands what is required of them. Under Ben-Gurion, a consensus of transfer is created.

Ben-Gurion was a 'transferist'?

Of course Ben-Gurion was a transferist. He understood that there could be no Jewish state with a large and hostile Arab minority in its midst. There would be no such state. It would not be able to exist.

I don't hear you condemning him.

Ben-Gurion was right. If he had not done what he did, a state would not have come into being. That has to be clear. It is impossible to evade it. Without the uprooting of the Palestinians, a Jewish state would not have arisen here.

Benny Morris, for decades you have been researching the dark side of Zionism. You are an expert on the atrocities of 1948. In the end, do you in effect justify all this? Are you an advocate of the transfer of 1948?

There is no justification for acts of rape. There is no justification for acts of massacre. Those are war crimes. But in certain conditions, expulsion is not a war crime. I don't think that the expulsions of 1948 were war crimes. You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs. You have to dirty your hands.

We are talking about the killing of thousands of people, the destruction of an entire society.

A society that aims to kill you forces you to destroy it. When the choice is between destroying or being destroyed, it's better to destroy.

There is something chilling about the quiet way in which you say that.

If you expected me to burst into tears, I'm sorry to disappoint you. I will not do that.

So when the commanders of Operation Dani are standing there and observing the long and terrible column of the 50,000 people expelled from Lod walking eastward, you stand there with them? You justify them?

I definitely understand them. I understand their motives. I don't think they felt any pangs of conscience, and in their place I wouldn't have felt

pangs of conscience. Without that act, they would not have won the war and the state would not have come into being.

You do not condemn them morally?

No.

They perpetrated ethnic cleansing.

There are circumstances in history that justify ethnic cleansing. I know that this term is completely negative in the discourse of the 21st century, but when the choice is between ethnic cleansing and genocide—the annihilation of your people—I prefer ethnic cleansing.

And that was the situation in 1948?

That was the situation. That is what Zionism faced. A Jewish state would not have come into being without the uprooting of 700,000 Palestinians. Therefore it was necessary to uproot them. There was no choice but to expel that population. It was necessary to cleanse the hinterland and cleanse the border areas and cleanse the main roads. It was necessary to cleanse the villages from which our convoys and our settlements were fired on.

The term ‘to cleanse’ is terrible.

I know it doesn't sound nice but that's the term they used at the time. I adopted it from all the 1948 documents in which I am immersed.

What you are saying is hard to listen to and hard to digest. You sound hard-hearted.

I feel sympathy for the Palestinian people, which truly underwent a hard tragedy. I feel sympathy for the refugees themselves. But if the desire to establish a Jewish state here is legitimate, there was no other choice. It was impossible to leave a large fifth column in the country. From the moment the Yishuv [pre-1948 Jewish community in Palestine] was attacked by the Palestinians and afterwards by the Arab states, there was no choice but to expel the Palestinian population. To uproot it in the course of war.

Remember another thing: the Arab people gained a large slice of the planet. Not thanks to its skills or its great virtues, but because it conquered and murdered and forced those it conquered to convert during many generations. But in the end the Arabs have 22 states. The Jewish people did not have even one state. There was no reason in the world why it should not have one state. Therefore, from my point of view, the need to establish this state in this place overcame the injustice that was done to the Palestinians by uprooting them.

And morally speaking, you have no problem with that deed?

That is correct. Even the great American democracy could not have been created without the annihilation of the Indians. There are cases in which the overall, final good justifies harsh and cruel acts that are committed in the course of history.

And in our case it effectively justifies a population transfer.

That's what emerges.

And you take that in your stride? War crimes? Massacres? The burning fields and the devastated villages of the Nakba?

You have to put things in proportion. These are small war crimes. All told, if we take all the massacres and all the executions of 1948, we come to about 800 who were killed. In comparison to the massacres that were perpetrated in Bosnia, that's peanuts. In comparison to the massacres the Russians perpetrated against the Germans at Stalingrad [sic], that's chicken feed. When you take into account that there was a bloody civil war here and that we lost an entire one percent of the population, you find that we behaved very well.

You went through an interesting process. You went to research Ben-Gurion and the Zionist establishment critically, but in the end you actually identify with them. You are as tough in your words as they were in their deeds.

You may be right. Because I investigated the conflict in depth, I was forced to cope with the in-depth questions that those people coped with. I understood the problematic character of the situation they faced and maybe I adopted part of their universe of concepts. But I do not identify

with Ben-Gurion. I think he made a serious historical mistake in 1948. Even though he understood the demographic issue and the need to establish a Jewish state without a large Arab minority, he got cold feet during the war. In the end, he faltered.

I'm not sure I understand. Are you saying that Ben-Gurion erred in expelling too few Arabs?

If he was already engaged in expulsion, maybe he should have done a complete job. I know that this stuns the Arabs and the liberals and the politically correct types. But my feeling is that this place would be quieter and know less suffering if the matter had been resolved once and for all. If Ben-Gurion had carried out a large expulsion and cleansed the whole country—the whole Land of Israel, as far as the Jordan River. It may yet turn out that this was his fatal mistake. If he had carried out a full expulsion—rather than a partial one—he would have stabilized the State of Israel for generations.

I find it hard to believe what I am hearing.

If the end of the story turns out to be a gloomy one for the Jews, it will be because Ben-Gurion did not complete the transfer in 1948. Because he left a large and volatile demographic reserve in the West Bank and Gaza and within Israel itself.

In his place, would you have expelled them all? All the Arabs in the country?

But I am not a statesman. I do not put myself in his place. But as an historian, I assert that a mistake was made here. Yes. The non-completion of the transfer was a mistake.

And today? Do you advocate a transfer today?

If you are asking me whether I support the transfer and expulsion of the Arabs from the West Bank, Gaza and perhaps even from Galilee and the Triangle, I say not at this moment. I am not willing to be a partner to that act. In the present circumstances it is neither moral nor realistic. The world would not allow it, the Arab world would not allow it, it would destroy the Jewish society from within. But I am ready to tell you that in other circumstances, apocalyptic ones, which are liable to be realized in

five or ten years, I can see expulsions. If we find ourselves with atomic weapons around us, or if there is a general Arab attack on us and a situation of warfare on the front, with Arabs in the rear shooting at convoys on their way to the front, acts of expulsion will be entirely reasonable. They may even be essential.

Including the expulsion of Israeli Arabs?

The Israeli Arabs are a time bomb. Their slide into complete Palestinization has made them an emissary of the enemy that is among us. They are a potential fifth column. In both demographic and security terms they are liable to undermine the state. So that if Israel again finds itself in a situation of existential threat, as in 1948, it may be forced to act as it did then. If we are attacked by Egypt (after an Islamist revolution in Cairo) and by Syria, and chemical and biological missiles slam into our cities, and at the same time Israeli Palestinians attack us from behind, I can see an expulsion situation. It could happen. If the threat to Israel is existential, expulsion will be justified.

Besides being tough, you are also very gloomy. You weren't always like that, were you?

My turning point began after 2000. I wasn't a great optimist even before that. True, I always voted Labour or Meretz or Sheli [a dovish party of the late 1970s], and in 1988 I refused to serve in the territories and was jailed for it, but I always doubted the intentions of the Palestinians. The events of Camp David and what followed in their wake turned the doubt into certainty. When the Palestinians rejected the proposal of [Prime Minister Ehud] Barak in July 2000 and the Clinton proposal in December 2000, I understood that they are unwilling to accept the two-state solution. They want it all. Lod and Acre and Jaffa.

If that's so, then the whole Oslo process was mistaken and there is a basic flaw in the entire worldview of the Israeli peace movement.

Oslo had to be tried. But today it has to be clear that from the Palestinian point of view, Oslo was a deception. Arafat did not change for the worse, Arafat simply defrauded us. He was never sincere in his readiness for compromise and conciliation.

Do you really believe Arafat wants to throw us into the sea?

He wants to send us back to Europe, to the sea we came from. He truly sees us as a Crusader state and he thinks about the Crusader precedent and wishes us a Crusader end. I'm certain that Israeli intelligence has unequivocal information proving that in internal conversations Arafat talks seriously about the phased plan [which would eliminate Israel in stages]. But the problem is not just Arafat. The entire Palestinian national elite is prone to see us as Crusaders and is driven by the phased plan. That's why the Palestinians are not honestly ready to forego the right of return. They are preserving it as an instrument with which they will destroy the Jewish state when the time comes. They can't tolerate the existence of a Jewish state—not in 80 per cent of the country and not in 30 per cent. From their point of view, the Palestinian state must cover the whole Land of Israel.

If so, the two-state solution is not viable; even if a peace treaty is signed, it will soon collapse.

Ideologically, I support the two-state solution. It's the only alternative to the expulsion of the Jews or the expulsion of the Palestinians or total destruction. But in practice, in this generation, a settlement of that kind will not hold water. At least 30 to 40 per cent of the Palestinian public and at least 30 to 40 per cent of the heart of every Palestinian will not accept it. After a short break, terrorism will erupt again and the war will resume.

Your prognosis doesn't leave much room for hope, does it?

It's hard for me, too. There is not going to be peace in the present generation. There will not be a solution. We are doomed to live by the sword. I'm already fairly old, but for my children that is especially bleak. I don't know if they will want to go on living in a place where there is no hope. Even if Israel is not destroyed, we won't see a good, normal life here in the decades ahead.

Aren't your harsh words an over-reaction to three hard years of terrorism?

The bombing of the buses and restaurants really shook me. They made me understand the depth of the hatred for us. They made me understand

that the Palestinian, Arab and Muslim hostility toward Jewish existence here is taking us to the brink of destruction. I don't see the suicide bombings as isolated acts. They express the deep will of the Palestinian people. That is what the majority of the Palestinians want. They want what happened to the bus to happen to all of us.

Yet we, too, bear responsibility for the violence and the hatred: the occupation, the roadblocks, the closures, maybe even the Nakba itself.

You don't have to tell me that. I have researched Palestinian history. I understand the reasons for the hatred very well. The Palestinians are retaliating now not only for yesterday's closure but for the Nakba as well. But that is not a sufficient explanation. The peoples of Africa were oppressed by the European powers no less than the Palestinians were oppressed by us, but nevertheless I don't see African terrorism in London, Paris or Brussels. The Germans killed far more of us than we killed the Palestinians, but we aren't blowing up buses in Munich and Nuremberg. So there is something else here, something deeper, that has to do with Islam and Arab culture.

Are you trying to argue that Palestinian terrorism derives from some sort of deep cultural problem?

There is a deep problem in Islam. It's a world whose values are different. A world in which human life doesn't have the same value as it does in the West, in which freedom, democracy, openness and creativity are alien. A world that makes those who are not part of the camp of Islam fair game. Revenge is also important here. Revenge plays a central part in the Arab tribal culture. Therefore, the people we are fighting and the society that sends them have no moral inhibitions. If it obtains chemical or biological or atomic weapons, it will use them. If it is able, it will also commit genocide.

I want to insist on my point: a large part of the responsibility for the hatred of the Palestinians rests with us. After all, you yourself showed us that the Palestinians experienced a historical catastrophe.

True. But when one has to deal with a serial killer, it's not so important to discover why he became a serial killer. What's important is to imprison the murderer or to execute him.

Explain the image: who is the serial killer in the analogy?

The barbarians who want to take our lives. The people the Palestinian society sends to carry out the terrorist attacks, and in some way the Palestinian society itself as well. At the moment, that society is in the state of being a serial killer. It is a very sick society. It should be treated the way we treat individuals who are serial killers.

What does that mean? What should we do tomorrow morning?

We have to try to heal the Palestinians. Maybe over the years the establishment of a Palestinian state will help in the healing process. But in the meantime, until the medicine is found, they have to be contained so that they will not succeed in murdering us.

To fence them in? To place them under closure?

Something like a cage has to be built for them. I know that sounds terrible. It is really cruel. But there is no choice. There is a wild animal there that has to be locked up in one way or another.

Benny Morris, have you joined the right wing?

No, no. I still think of myself as left-wing. I still support in principle two states for two peoples.

But you don't believe that this solution will last. You don't believe in peace.

In my opinion, we will not have peace, no.

Then what is your solution?

In this generation there is apparently no solution. To be vigilant, to defend the country as far as is possible.

The iron wall approach?

Yes. An iron wall is a good image. An iron wall is the most reasonable policy for the coming generation. My colleague Avi Shlaim described this well: what Jabotinsky proposed is what Ben-Gurion adopted. In the

1950s, there was a dispute between Ben-Gurion and Moshe Sharett. Ben-Gurion argued that the Arabs understand only force and that ultimate force is the one thing that will persuade them to accept our presence here. He was right. That's not to say that we don't need diplomacy. Both toward the West and for our own conscience, it's important that we strive for a political solution. But in the end, what will decide their readiness to accept us will be force alone. Only the recognition that they are not capable of defeating us.

For a left-winger, you sound very much like a right-winger, wouldn't you say?

I'm trying to be realistic. I know it doesn't always sound politically correct, but I think that political correctness poisons history in any case. It impedes our ability to see the truth. And I also identify with Albert Camus. He was considered a left-winger and a person of high morals, but when he referred to the Algerian problem he placed his mother ahead of morality. Preserving my people is more important than universal moral concepts.

Are you a neo-conservative? Do you read the current historical reality in the terms of Samuel Huntington?

I think there is a clash between civilizations here [as Huntington argues]. I think the West today resembles the Roman Empire of the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries: the barbarians are attacking it and they may also destroy it.

The Muslims are barbarians, then?

I think the values I mentioned earlier are values of barbarians—the attitude toward democracy, freedom, openness; the attitude toward human life. In that sense they are barbarians. The Arab world as it is today is barbarian.

And in your view these new barbarians are truly threatening the Rome of our time?

Yes. The West is stronger but it's not clear whether it knows how to repulse this wave of hatred. The phenomenon of the mass Muslim penetration into the West and their settlement there is creating a dangerous

internal threat. A similar process took place in Rome. They let the barbarians in and they toppled the empire from within.

Is it really all that dramatic? Is the West truly in danger?

Yes. I think that the war between the civilizations is the main characteristic of the 21st century. I think President Bush is wrong when he denies the very existence of that war. It's not only a matter of bin Laden. This is a struggle against a whole world that espouses different values. And we are on the front line. Exactly like the Crusaders, we are the vulnerable branch of Europe in this place.

The situation as you describe it is extremely harsh. You are not entirely convinced that we can survive here, are you?

The possibility of annihilation exists.

Would you describe yourself as an apocalyptic person?

The whole Zionist project is apocalyptic. It exists within hostile surroundings and in a certain sense its existence is unreasonable. It wasn't reasonable for it to succeed in 1881 and it wasn't reasonable for it to succeed in 1948 and it's not reasonable that it will succeed now. Nevertheless, it has come this far. In a certain way it is miraculous. I live the events of 1948, and 1948 projects itself on what could happen here. Yes, I think of Armageddon. It's possible. Within the next twenty years there could be an atomic war here.

If Zionism is so dangerous for the Jews and if Zionism makes the Arabs so wretched, maybe it's a mistake?

No, Zionism was not a mistake. The desire to establish a Jewish state here was a legitimate one, a positive one. But given the character of Islam and given the character of the Arab nation, it was a mistake to think that it would be possible to establish a tranquil state here that lives in harmony with its surroundings.

Which leaves us, nevertheless, with two possibilities: either a cruel, tragic Zionism, or the foregoing of Zionism.

Yes. That's so. You have pared it down, but that's correct.

Would you agree that this historical reality is intolerable, that there is something inhuman about it?

Yes. But that's so for the Jewish people, not the Palestinians. A people that suffered for 2,000 years, that went through the Holocaust, arrives at its patrimony but is thrust into a renewed round of bloodshed, that is perhaps the road to annihilation. In terms of cosmic justice, that's terrible. It's far more shocking than what happened in 1948 to a small part of the Arab nation that was then in Palestine.

So what you are telling me is that you live the Palestinian Nakba of the past less than you live the possible Jewish Nakba of the future?

Yes. Destruction could be the end of this process. It could be the end of the Zionist experiment. And that's what really depresses and scares me.



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ACHIN VANAIK

RENDEZVOUS AT MUMBAI

THERE WAS AN obvious irony in shifting the 2004 World Social Forum from Porto Alegre, home of the participatory budget, to an indifferent Mumbai, the city most starkly symbolizing the impact of neoliberalism in India. Mumbai's booming stockmarket and Indian GDP growth figures of around 8 per cent for 2003–04 are constantly cited as evidence of a new Shining India, the feel-good slogan that has been rapidly internalized, courtesy of incessant media repetition, by the Indian 'middle class'.¹ Annual software exports have now reached the \$16bn mark, and the country has \$100bn in foreign reserves. The Central government is pushing ahead with its privatization programme, selling off stakes in the big profit-makers—companies such as the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation and Gas Authority of India—while starving potentially healthy enterprises such as Air India and Indian Airlines of necessary investment until failing balance sheets can be used to justify privatization.

In fact, the GDP growth figures have been lifted largely by the spectacular monsoons of 2003, which dramatically raised agricultural output. Averaged over five years, the growth rate remains around 5.8 per cent, the level the Indian economy has sustained for the last two decades, while foreign investment has not yet surpassed the 1997 peak of \$4bn. Social and regional inequalities have worsened, with the consumption expenditure of the urban top two deciles rising by a historically unprecedented 30 per cent in the six-year period 1997–2002, the material basis for claims of 'Shining India'. By contrast, the rural top two deciles had a consumption rise of 10 per cent but the remaining rural population—the

vast majority of Indians—witnessed a consumption decline.² More striking still is the relatively jobless character of current growth patterns, even compared to the 1980s. The number of unemployed was nearly 35 million in 2002, and is expected to be over 40 million in 2007. The employment elasticity of output has fallen from 0.52 for the period 1983–94, to 0.16 for 1993–2000. There were 740,000 applicants for 20,000 posts in the lowest, Group D category on the Indian railways last year—essentially, gangmen's jobs. Among the applicants were MBAs, post-graduates and engineers. The outsourcing of US white-collar work to Indian call centres, etc., currently exercising American voters, accounts for a tiny drop in this ocean. There were approximately four hundred call centres in India in 2003, employing around 100,000 people; 40 per cent of their business is domestic.³ It is here that the political weak spot of Indian neoliberalism resides: in the not-too-distant prospect of a substantial layer of youth from the low-to-middling echelons of the 'middle class', mainly educated in provincial colleges, becoming disillusioned with the heady promises of a neoliberal project that currently still retains its appeal.

Sanctified massacres

Politically, the last two years have seen a qualitative move to the right in India. The nightmarish anti-Muslim pogroms in Gujarat in the spring of 2002, perpetrated with the full complicity of the state government under BJP Chief Minister Narendra Modi, have proved a terrible watershed. On 27 February 2002 activists from the Sangh Parivar—the *Hindutva*

² Far from being a median category, the misnamed 'middle class' is better understood as a mass elite, comprising the top 10 to 15 per cent of Indian society. For a fuller treatment of the Indian economy's basic character, the rise to power of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata (Indian People's) Party (BJP) and institutionalization of *Hindutva*—the 'politics of Hinduness'—see my 'India's New Right', *NLR* 9, May–June 2001.

³ I am grateful to Abhijit Sen at Jawaharlal Nehru University for sharing data from his latest study, 'Poverty and Inequality in India: Getting Closer to the Truth', *Economic and Political Weekly*: forthcoming. There has been an intense debate in the EPW, to which Sen has made a key contribution, over the accuracy of poverty figures in India following the government's methodological changes in 1999–2000. His estimate for numbers below the poverty line in 2002, by 'monthly recall method', is 35 per cent of the Indian population, some 364 million people.

⁴ According to the National Association of Software and Service Companies: www.nasscom.org

family of organizations, whose main components are the cadre-based Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the BJP and the lumpen storm-troopers of the Bajrang Dal (Lord Hanuman's Troops)—were returning to Gujarat by train from a 'March on Ayodhya' when the molestation of a Muslim girl on the platform of Godhra station provoked an attack by an angry Muslim mob. One of the train carriages was torched and fifty-eight people died in the flames. The assault served as the awaited trigger for a carefully pre-planned, state-backed 'retaliatory' pogrom, in which orchestrated violence against the Muslim population spread throughout Gujarat, lasting for over a month. More than 2,000 Muslims were butchered and around 150,000 driven out of their homes. There was looting, property destruction, sadistic beatings, injuries and rape on a massive scale.⁴

This was not only the worst case of sustained communal violence since Partition, but the first time that a state government had been so deeply involved in preparing and carrying out such a massacre.⁵ What marked it as a turning point was not so much that the direct perpetrators got away with their criminal behaviour—this has happened often enough before—but that the Sangh and the BJP got away with it politically. During the month-long pogrom there was strong condemnation of the Modi government's role not only from opposition parties but even from the BJP's allies in the ruling coalition, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). Massive extra-parliamentary mobilization by the opposition at national and regional levels, inside and outside Gujarat, could have broken the coalition government. This never happened. The Congress, which should have led such a campaign, had neither the courage nor the anti-communal commitment to do so.

⁴ A broad range of reports on different aspects of the Gujarat pogrom are available at www.onlinevolunteers.org

⁵ While the official tally of deaths in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots after the assassination of Mrs Gandhi was around 3,000, they pale in comparison to what happened in Gujarat. Although the local Congress leaders behind the 1984 violence have not been punished, the party has publicly apologized for what happened. The brutality and sadism, the scale, geographic extent and duration of communal violence were much greater in Gujarat, as was the degree of state-apparatus complicity. Given the deeper historical roots of anti-Muslim sentiment and the existence, in the Sangh, of a powerful grassroots organization dedicated to cultivating and exploiting it for political ends, the negative implications of Gujarat 2002 are much more profound.

As a result, Prime Minister Vajpayee was free to make the agenda-setting speech at a BJP gathering in Goa, at the end of May 2002, that can in retrospect be seen as the official proclamation of the Indian polity's rightward shift. Vajpayee defended the pogrom as an unavoidable reaction to the Godhra incident. He categorically rejected the demand from his NDA allies to remove Modi as Chief Minister of Gujarat, effectively challenging them to make their choice—either to pull down his government and precipitate early elections or fall quietly into line. He also made an international pitch, linking the BJP's stand to that of the US Administration, by declaring Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism the world's principal danger. The NDA coalition thus remained intact, with the BJP's authority within it greatly strengthened. Modi called early polls in Gujarat in December 2002, campaigning on an openly communal platform which not merely justified but celebrated the pogrom—a tactic that the Congress was scared to oppose directly, instead highlighting the Modi government's 'general performance failure'. For the first time ever, the BJP obtained a two-thirds majority in the provincial assembly, due to a massive gain in votes and seats in Central Gujarat where most of the violence had been concentrated. The result only further deadened the enfeebled anti-communal reflexes of the Congress.

End of the Congress?

The provincial assembly elections of December 2003 in the key Hindi heartland states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Delhi were a further boost to the BJP. Here Hindutva was not the major factor behind the debacle of the Congress, but it nevertheless contributed to the BJP's success. The governing party gained absolute majorities in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, where the Congress had previously been in power and was expected to do reasonably well, holding on to two if not all three of these states. It ended up retaining only Delhi, on a very low turnout—53 per cent, compared to 67–71 per cent for the others. Suddenly, the most sober assessments of the coming general elections, now advanced to April 2004, suggest that the BJP-led NDA coalition has easily the strongest chance of coming back to power. Although the NDA parties, BJP included, would seem to have reached their electoral peak in terms of seats secured during the last general elections of 1999—with the BJP tally reaching a plateau of around 180 Lok Sabha seats, out of 542—the coalition's ranks could

well expand further through the wholesale defection of some of the pre-poll Congress allies.⁶

The 2004 elections could prove a turning point not because the BJP makes a qualitative leap in its share of the vote but because the Congress may collapse as a national party. Programmatically, it is in all key respects a softer version of the BJP, although without either its powerful cadre base (courtesy of the RSS), its aggressive policy of using major personnel changes to transform governing structures or its determination to remodel India as a pure 'Hindu nation', the monocultural Hindu Rashtra. Socially, the Congress is now losing its last, hitherto stable base, the Central Indian Adivasis—'original inhabitants' or indigenous people—to the BJP.⁷ For a full five decades after Independence, every single breakaway from the Congress quickly faded into oblivion, even those with leaders whose national stature had been forged in the great pre-1947 freedom struggle. Since 1997 two such breakaways, the Trinamul Congress of West Bengal and the National Congress Party of Maharashtra, have stabilized as major regional parties not in the least afraid to hobnob with the BJP.

What holds the Congress together today is not ideology or organizational solidity but the promise of power at the Centre. If it fails once again to achieve this goal, as the hub of an alternative ruling coalition (supported from the outside by India's two mainstream left parties, the CPI

⁶ In the 1999 Lok Sabha (People's Assembly) elections, the NDA won all the 23 seats of Haryana, Delhi, Himachal and Goa put together; 20 out of 26 in Gujarat, 36 out of 42 in Andhra Pradesh, 16 out of 25 in Rajasthan, 26 out of 39 in Tamil Nadu, 28 out of 48 in Maharashtra, 41 out of 54 in Bihar, 19 out of 21 in Orissa, 29 out of 40 in Madhya Pradesh–Chhattisgarh.

⁷ Around 8 per cent of the overall population, Adivasis make up some 25 per cent of the electorate in the Central Indian forest/tribal belt also covering parts of Rajasthan, MP and Chhattisgarh, where they are mainly small farmers, gatherers and hawkers of forest produce or informal-sector labourers. Long-term grassroots activism by RSS cadres has built up a network of Vanvasi Kalyan Ashrams (the Sangh prefers the term *vanvasi*, forest dweller, to *adivasi*, since for them Aryans must be India's original inhabitants) catering to their welfare needs with clinics, dispensaries, etc. The RSS's campaign of 'reconversion' to its own peculiar brand of Hinduism (a large proportion of Adivasis are Christians) has the appeal of psychological and cultural upliftment, through identification with a socially stronger and more prosperous 'Hindu' community. Aided by Congress complacency, and their own sophisticated micro-management of local electoral processes, the BJP has won 77 out of the 99 constituencies reserved for tribal candidates, the Congress carried sixteen.

and CPM), it will likely suffer serious defections to the BJP/NDA as well as further splits into one or more regional parties in the northern states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. The Congress is now prepared to make the kind of parliamentary concessions it never contemplated before—leaving 150 to 200 seats for its coalition allies to contest; assuring them that prime ministership will be decided collectively, and not automatically devolve on Sonia Gandhi as leader of the largest single party in the bloc. Rahul and Priyanka, the son and daughter of Rajiv and Sonia Gandhi—and, unlike their mother, Indian born—are likely to be thrown into the fray, a measure of Congress desperation in its attempts to counter BJP promotion of the ‘Vajpayee charisma’. If the Congress does collapse, as seems entirely possible, the BJP will become the only national party. Within the space of fifteen years, it will have made the journey from far-right outcast to natural party of government and institutionalized its status as the normal fulcrum of bourgeois political rule; a development with momentous and deeply disturbing implications.

Post-industrial sprawl

It was within this context that the hundred thousand delegates to the fourth World Social Forum gathered in Mumbai between 16th and 21st January 2004. The city itself is a heavily polluted, financial-commercial centre, a vast conurbation of some 17 million people, over 40 per cent of them living in slums. For the past ten years the Greater Mumbai municipality has been run by Shiv Sena, one of the most virulent components of the Sangh Parivar, which has extended its tentacles deep into the lucrative construction industry while simultaneously institutionalizing its politics of patronage in the slums. Once India’s greatest textile and industrial city, Mumbai could formerly boast over sixty giant cotton-mills, mainly housed in the southern districts, as well as engineering units, metallurgical foundries, chemical plants, pharmaceutical industries and electrical-goods factories, in a huge swathe stretching north from the central zone, then branching east and west. In the great textile strike of 1982, a quarter of a million cotton workers came out for over a year—the last courageous but ultimately unsuccessful act of resistance by organized labour in the city.

Today, production has either ceased or shifted to the lower-cost towns of the hinterland—Nagpur, Aurangabad, Nasik; the small power-loom plants of Bhiwandi. Pharmaceuticals have been transferred to new-built

units as far afield as Gujarat, to take advantage of cheap labour and tax incentives. In Mumbai, the factory lands left derelict by de-industrialization have been partially redeveloped with the standard construction package of food-and-entertainment plazas, shopping malls and office complexes. The slum districts, stretching northwards from the centre, for the most part exist cheek-by-jowl with these commercial centres, since this is where informal-sector activities are most likely to thrive. Indeed, Asia's largest single unified slum area, a virtual township called Dharavi—home to around a million people, and encompassing not just shanty-town eateries, services and residences but also numerous small-scale workshops—is situated right in the city centre, minute's away from the glass and concrete towers of the Bandra-Kurla financial district.

The choice of the wsf venue—a dusty, environment-unfriendly, long disused industrial site in the northeast of the city—completed the symbolism. There was a legitimate worry that moving the wsf from Latin America, the continent of greatest resistance to neoliberalism, to Vajpayee's India, could be a mistake. From the *piqueteros* of Argentina to the indigenous insurgents of Bolivia or *barrio* mobilizations of Chávez's Venezuela, it is there that mass politicization is at its deepest and widest today. Nor has the Subcontinent anything comparable to Latin America's historical popular revolutionary traditions. At Mumbai, the flip side of the wsf's extraordinary diversity—the striking displays of music, dance and street theatre, the strong presence of Dalits, tribals, women's groups and trade unions—was the fact that political awareness was more limited and sectoral in character. Neither leaders nor ordinary members of many of the large movements and groups gathered there showed much interest or involvement in the conferences, seminars and workshops lying outside their specific areas of concern. Low literacy levels and breakdowns in the technical facilities provided for translations did not fully explain this weakness, whose basic roots are political.⁸

But the restricted area of the Mumbai site, contrasting sharply with the sprawling geography of Porto Alegre's wsf, forced an extraordinary commingling of the 100,000 participants, more than 15,000 of whom

⁸ Inadequate infrastructure obviously hampered discussion and mass participation, especially in the big conferences. This failing was linked to the otherwise laudable determination of the organizers to limit foreign funding and keep overall costs low—around \$2.4m, a third that of Porto Alegre.

came from outside India. Asia, from east, south and west, was well represented, as was Western Europe.⁹ Coupled with the unmatched social and cultural diversity of India itself, fully present at Mumbai, this created a general atmosphere of collective solidarity and vitality that has set a new standard for future WSFs.¹⁰ By contrast, the social composition of participants at the third WSF was younger and far more middle-class. If the youth camp in Porto Alegre was a considerable success, in Mumbai it was organizationally and politically a disappointment. The ironies and contrasts do not end here. Lula, unwanted at, and uninvited to, the WSF was the honoured guest of the BJP government at this year's official Republic Day celebrations on January 26, 2004.

India's Left

The Social Forum project that first emerged in Latin America in 2001 reflected a new historical conjuncture—not just the two-decade assault of neoliberalism on that continent but also the effective disintegration of the old left and its replacement by a more inchoate, plural and diverse set of progressive actors.¹¹ Their growing radicalization in the late 1990s catalysed into the hope of a new type of internationalism at the WTO protests in Seattle in 1999, and found its organizational expression in the WSF and its associated 'politics of the open space'. India, however, is where the old left (still largely unrepentant about its Stalinist and Maoist legacies and traditions) survives as a substantial force, replete with its own mass fronts of trade unions, women, peasant and student

⁹ Approximate numbers of participants included: Middle East: 200, with Egypt, Palestine and Turkey (in that order) the largest contingents; China: 200; Japan: over 1,100; South Korea: 200; Philippines: 400; Sri Lanka: over 450; Bangladesh: over 1,200; Pakistan: 800; Bhutan: 500; Burma: 100; Nepal: over 1,300 (includes those resident in India); Thailand: 200; Malaysia: 50; Indonesia: 150; Afghanistan: 60. There were also 100 South Africans present, and 500 came from Kenya (the strongest African candidate for holding WSF 2006).

¹⁰ The remarkable diversity of Indian participation was ensured by the involvement of 190 organizations in the Indian General Council, the ultimate decision-making authority for the fourth WSF. Last year's Brazilian General Council comprised 8 organizations. The IGC nominated the main executive body, the Indian Organizing Committee, which in turn selected the Mumbai Organizing Committee. In the IOC the CPI, CPM, certain NGOs and a number of big Dalit organizations from southern India played major roles.

¹¹ For the origins and prospects of the World Social Forum project see Tom Mertes, ed., *A Movement of Movements*, London 2004, *passim*.

wings.¹² Since only 3 per cent of the total 340 million labour force are unionized, it is hardly surprising that there also exists a breathtaking array of social movements, single-issue groups and a spectrum of NGOs, from the most radical to those whose principal function is to be the providers of newly privatized services, offsetting the impact of the neoliberal state's abandonment of its multiple social responsibilities in health, education and basic needs.

All these contradictions were clearly present in Mumbai. Where else would you find, for the first time, an alternative world social forum called Mumbai Resistance being organized across the road from the official one, by a variety of Maoist groups and fronts whose principal ballasts were the Peoples War Group of India and the Communist Party of the Philippines? Much smaller, with an overall attendance in the few thousands, MR's main purpose was to call attention to itself. Its inaugural function spent nearly as much time criticizing the wsf as it did attacking neoliberalism or US imperialism.¹³ But even outside the entrances of the main wsf, inconsistent certainly with the prevailing spirit of the Social Forum project, the CPI and the CPM had strategically placed huge billboards (hitting visitors' eyes well before the wsf signs themselves) declaring that their idea of another world was the 'Communist Future'. A strongly instrumentalist attitude towards the Forum still prevails amongst these left parties.

¹² The original Communist Party of India split in 1964, along broadly Moscow/Beijing lines, into the CPI and CPM (Communist Party of India/Marxist). The CPM-led Left Front coalition has governed West Bengal, a province of over 60 million people, since 1977. Little different from any other state in its attempts to attract private capital through low labour costs, subsidized infrastructure and tax concessions, it is currently pushing through a Central government scheme for contract-hiring teachers at a miserable Rs. 1,500 a month, raising charges in schools and hospitals, and carrying out slum evictions in Kolkata (Calcutta). Nevertheless, it has a better than average record in agricultural growth, poverty alleviation, democratic devolution and—with proportionately the second largest Muslim population of any state—has made a genuine contribution to sustaining communal tranquility.

¹³ Though many of their criticisms are valid—the political limitations of the wsf as currently constituted; the continuing legitimacy in certain situations of violent self-defence; the dangers of NGO-ization, the ulterior motives of certain funding sources—none of this precluded their participation in the wsf, where they would have been free to argue these points. Respect for the role played by some of the groups in MR in defending the poorest sections of society (this is certainly the case in India) should not prevent a counter-critique of their time-warp politics and unfortunate sectarianism.

Nevertheless, after allowing for all reservations and qualifications, the end results justified the decision to hold the fourth wsf in India. In 2003, Porto Alegre brought together for the first time the two chief streams of global opposition—the movement against neoliberalism and that against us imperialism. This confluence was sustained and further consolidated in Mumbai. The Indian organizers gave some shape to the otherwise amorphous character of the ‘politics of the open space’ by holding a series of wsf-sponsored events focusing on five broad themes—imperialist globalization; patriarchy, gender and sexuality; militarism and peace; casteism and racism; religious fanaticism and sectarian violence. Further discussions included the questions of sustainable development; food, land and water sovereignty; media culture and knowledge; labour issues; health, education and social security.¹⁴

Movements and parties

In addition, a conscious effort was made (with uneven success) to promote more thorough reflection on the relationship between political parties and social movements, alternatives to neoliberal globalization and the contemporary role of the nation-state and nationalism. The extent to which various activist groups were also able to utilize the Mumbai wsf to enhance international co-ordination, networking and planning for common actions clearly varied, and the results of their endeavours will only become evident in the future.

How should we assess the impact of Mumbai on the current Indian political scene? One of the central purposes of the Indian organizers

¹⁴ Keynote speakers: *Imperialist globalization*: Immanuel Wallerstein, Samir Amin, Walden Bello, Arundhati Roy, Abdul Amir Al-Rekaby (Iraqi National Democratic Coalition); *Gender*: Nawal El Saadawi (Egypt), Saher Saba (Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan), Brinda Karat (CPM); *Militarism*: Jeremy Corbyn (UK), Dennis Brutus (South Africa), Muto Ichijo (Japan), Chandra Muzaffar (Malaysia), Beverley Keene (Jubilee South, Argentina), Nguyen Binh (Vietnam), Mustafa Barghouti (Palestinian National Initiative), *Religious fundamentalism*: Shirin Ebadi (Iran), Pervez Hoodbhoy (Pakistan), Tanika Sarkar (India); *Casteism*: Blanca Chancoso (Ecuador), Ram Dayal Munda (Jharkhand tribals' leader), Gopal Guru (Dalit intellectual); *Food and water sovereignty*: Maud Barlow (Canada), José Bové (France), Medha Patkar (India), *Media*: N. Ram (editor of *The Hindu* and *Frontline*), Richard Stallman (Free Software Foundation), Roberto Savio (Inter Press Service, Italy), Bernard Cassen (*Monde diplomatique*); *Parties and movements*: Fausto Bertinotti (Rifondazione, Italy), Aruna Roy (Right to Information Campaign), Luis Ayala (Chile), Alejandro Bendana (Nicaragua) Prakash Karat (CPM), D Raja (CPI).

of the wsf was that it should stimulate the further development of a national 'anti-communalist front' against the Sangh/BJP. The intent here is not just an electoral bloc but the formation of a long-term alliance of left parties and their mass fronts, the big social movements and a range of progressive NGOs, to mobilize collectively against the depredations of the Sangh. Have the wsf 2004 and the Asian Social Forum at Hyderabad in January 2003 helped bring these forces together? Mutual suspicions and tensions remain within the social movements and parties as well as between them. There has been constant jockeying for public representation in the 'star system'—a seemingly unavoidable aspect of the Social Forum process. There are inevitable fears about manipulation and doubts about ulterior motives. One of the important issues thrown up by the wsfs is whether it might not be better for parties to participate openly, instead of exercising their substantial influence informally and behind-the-scenes as they do now—whether in Brazil (the PT) or in India (CPM and CPI)—in response to the 'anti-party' stance of some NGOs and social movements.

This could result in a more honest dialogue between party spokespersons and others. The former could no longer dodge direct critiques of their record, in and out of office. This would surely encourage a less manipulative relationship, whereby genuine adjustments and greater mutual respect could be forged. The fear in India is that Social Forums could become arenas in which the pressures of electoral competition trump efforts at accommodation—all the more possible if mass fronts but not parties themselves are present. It might also help to clarify the basis on which parties are to be allowed in or kept out. If the CPM, which has made major concessions to neoliberal pressures in West Bengal, can participate, then why not the Congress?

Overall, it would be fair to say that the mass fronts and substantial sections within the left parties, including many of their major leaders, have moved closer to the social movements and progressive NGOs, and vice versa. These steps toward joint work are still hesitant, wary and uneasy. There remains a lack of that kind of general perspective that could help systematize forms of collaboration going beyond occasional common actions. But the movement forward is real. Internationally, the Indian left has nowhere to turn except towards a global radical milieu that is naturally anti-Stalinist and much more developed in its attitudes on sexual choice, female oppression and ecological sustainability.

Domestically, greater co-ordination amongst radical forces is required to confront the neoliberal project as well. In this respect, public opposition in India is likely to grow. In Latin America what tipped the balance towards mass resistance was the antagonism of whole swathes of the middle class, whose savings were destroyed by the combination of unstable currencies, recession and unemployment. This has not yet happened in India. The neoliberal reforms have a shorter history, and a more cautious approach to capital convertibility has provided a measure of protection. But the problem of educated unemployment is rising to serious proportions. A growing crisis of expectations is starting to emerge.

International perspectives

Parallel concerns exist at the international level. Greater collaboration between the main radical actors—parties, unions, movements, the best NGOs—is urgently required. The crucial task remains what it has always been—how best to combine the politics of the universal and the politics of the particular. The first is most powerful and effective precisely when it encompasses and respects the latter. Historically, the classical, indeed only, organizational form that has shown itself capable of embodying this combination has been the political party. One need not assume that this must remain the case. But the principal challenge facing the Social Forum project is whether it will be able to contribute to the creation of those new organizational forms equipped with the general vision and capacity to simultaneously and systematically pursue the politics of the universal and the particular. Insofar as the state remains a crucial node of concentrated bourgeois power, no radical strategy can afford to ignore or sidestep it.

Rather than maintain the hectic pace of a wsf every year, which drains the time and energy of too many activists from their basic areas of implantation and concern, it would be much better after the fifth wsf in Porto Alegre next year to schedule these global gatherings for every second or even third year. This would allow for more forums to be held at intermediate (city, provincial, national and regional) levels. The time has surely also come to take a breather and synthesize the experiences and lessons of the project so far. The one great lacuna has been the failure to extend the forums to North America, particularly the us. Even at the wsfs, American participation has always been disproportionately

smaller than the showing at Seattle might have augured. This insularity must be broken.

It can legitimately be claimed that, without the Social Forum project, neither the global anti-war mobilizations of 15 February 2003 nor the protests at the Cancún wto conference in September 2003 would have been anywhere near as successful. By that measure the international demonstrations against the Anglo-American occupation of Iraq called for 20 March 2004 will be a major test. It is unlikely that these will reach the level of February 15th last year. Demanding an end to the us occupation will not mobilize all the constituencies that were prepared to come out before the war. But a million marching worldwide would be an undoubtedly step forward for anti-imperialist forces—including those in Iraq itself. More than the Social Forum project is at stake.

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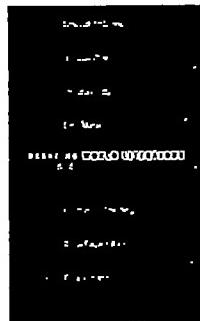


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PERRY ANDERSON

THE RIVER OF TIME

UTOPIA HAS always been one of Fredric Jameson's defining concerns. No intellectual thread has been more continuous in his work, from *Marxism and Form* through to *A Singular Modernity*, whose final words read: 'What we really need is a wholesale displacement of the thematics of modernity by the desire called Utopia. We need to combine a Poundian mission to identify Utopian tendencies with a Benjaminian geography of their sources and a gauging of their pressure at what are now multiple sea levels. Ontologies of the present demand archaeologies of the future, not forecasts of the past'.¹ Yet though present everywhere, this is a concern that for the first time comes into full focus in the essay published in NLR 25. 'The Politics of Utopia' offers his most comprehensive meditation to date on a subject central to his work.

I

Utopias, Jameson remarks, have always come in two dimensions—existential and institutional, visions of another human nature or an alternative civic order. Criss-crossed by traces of the manifesto, the constitution, the mirror of princes, of the prophetic or satiric, they occupy a peculiar political space, flourishing not in times of revolutionary upheaval as such, when popular demands concentrate on a short-list of immediate practical priorities—so to speak, bread, land and peace—but in the calm before the storm, when institutional arrangements appear unchangeable, but minds have been set free by some still unseen tectonic shifts to reinvent the world. Born at moments of the suspension of politics—if suspended in the sense of the legendary sword—utopias so conceived retain, for all their potential luxuriance of detail, at root a stubborn negativity, an emblem of what, despite everything, we *cannot*

grasp or imagine, and which the characteristic oscillations and oppositions within the utopian repertoire bespeak.

There are two reasons, Jameson now suggests, for that paradox, to which he has often alluded, but not hitherto explored: on the one hand, the ideological astigmatism that comes from any possible class position from which a utopia might be imagined; and on the other the constitutive fear that every human subject must feel at the dizzying notion of a loss of all familiar—habitual or sexual—coordinates of the self, in any complete systemic change. So it is that if we ask today what a utopian political programme might look like, perhaps—in the spirit of Adorno's suggestion that emancipation be negatively defined as that state where no-one went without food—a contemporary answer might be: that condition where no-one, anywhere in the world, went without work; a demand capable in its modesty of overthrowing every social, economic and moral institution we know.¹

2

If such is a rough outline of the argument of 'The Politics of Utopia', two of its themes invite variations. The first is a striking passage in which Jameson locates the emergence of utopias in periods of stillness before revolutionary tempests. Historically, there is little doubt that this has indeed been a recurrent pattern. More's own utopia, in 1516, preceded the outbreak of the Reformation that convulsed Europe, and consumed More himself, by less than a year. The next cluster of significant utopias—Campanella's *City of the Sun* (1623), Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627) and Robert Burton's idiosyncratic digression in *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621–38)—appeared in the period before the outbreak of the English Civil War and the Neapolitan Uprising of the 17th century. The greatest utopian reverie of the 18th century, Diderot's *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville* (1772), was written a generation before the French Revolution. In the 19th century, too, the remarkable set of utopian fictions in the last years of the century—Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888), Morris's reply in *News*

¹ *A Singular Modernity*, London–New York 2002, p. 215. For earlier reflections, see *Marxism and Form*, Princeton 1971, pp. 110–59; *The Political Unconscious*, Ithaca 1981, pp. 281–99; *The Ideologies of Theory*, Minneapolis 1988, vol. II, pp. 75–101; *Signatures of the Visible*, New York–London 1990, pp. 9–34; *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham–London 1991, pp. 154–80.

² 'The Politics of Utopia', NLR 25, January–February 2004, pp. 35–54.

from *Nowhere* (1890), Hertzka's *Freiland* (also 1890), to which we might add, as a pendant from the Far East, Kang Youwei's *Great Consonance* (1888–1902)—precede the turbulences of 1905–11 in Russia and China, the outbreak of the First World War, and the October Revolution. In the 20th century, again, the trio of great exile utopias written in Los Angeles and Boston—Adorno's *Minima Moralia* (1943–45), Ernst Bloch's *Principle of Hope* (1938–47) and Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* (1955)—were composed long in advance of the explosion of the late sixties.

In all these cases, Jameson's hypothesis holds good. What of its tacit corollary, that during revolutionary whirlwinds themselves, the voices of utopia fall silent? That seems more doubtful. In each great upheaval, arresting visions of a radically different future continued to be produced. During the English Revolution, we have only to think of Winstanley's astonishing *Law of Freedom*, or Harrington's *Commonwealth of Oceana*, which has claims to have been one of the two most influential political utopias of all times. During the cycle of the French Revolution, there was Babeuf's Conspiracy of Equals under the Directory, and the lightning-flash of Fourier's *Theory of the Four Movements*, written as Napoleon was triumphing at Jena. The Russian Revolution saw apparitions of a peasant utopia, eerily ambiguous in the country's greatest writer, Andrei Platonov, and ingenuously affirmative in its most original sociologist, Alexander Chayanov.³ As for the eruptions of 1968 and after, this was the time of the feminist utopias that Jameson evokes in his conclusion: Shulamith Firestone's *Dialectic of Sex* (1970), Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), composed as the us was finally driven out of Vietnam. Festivals of the oppressed, in Lenin's phrase—it could just as well be Bakhtin's—revolutions typically combine explosions of the immediate with saturnalia of the ultimate, rather than the one necessarily excluding the other.

3

Where do these precedents leave us today? Jameson, after pointing out that apparently stationary political circumstances are capable of generating

³ Platonov's *Chevengur* (1927–28) has been brilliantly discussed by Jameson himself in *The Seeds of Time*, New York 1994, pp. 78–123. Chayanov's *Puteshestvie moego brata Alekseya v stranu krest'janskoi utopii* (1920) was reissued in New York, 1981. These were part of a much vaster utopian production that flourished in Russia after the revolution.

an intense utopian productivity, notes on the other hand that 'most of human history has unfolded in situations of general impotence, when no revolts seem even conceivable, let alone around the corner', yet also when no utopian images of the future ever surface. He invites us to wonder which of these two constellations might now be our own. In asking ourselves this question, two dicta—at opposite ends of the stretch of time that has elapsed since the last great period of political turmoil in the world—are worth recalling. In 1967, on the eve of an international chain of revolts the like of which had not been seen for over a century, Herbert Marcuse—utopian thinker *par excellence* of the dead season before it—gave a talk in Berlin. Its title was 'The End of Utopia'. What did he mean? The true substance of utopianism, he argued, was not to be found in the creation of a realm of freedom beyond the realm of necessity, leaving an irreducible residue of unfree labour, as Marx had envisaged. It lay rather in the disappearance of alienated labour altogether, in the more plenary freedom imagined by Fourier, in which work and play became indistinguishable. That once extravagant prospect was now quite feasible. 'All the material and intellectual forces', he declared, 'which could be put into effect for the realization of a free society are at hand'.⁴ Mobilization to release these forces in a social revolution no longer required any great leap of the imagination. In that sense, utopianism had run its course.

Three decades later, Immanuel Wallerstein, founder of one of the most influential critical theories of world capitalism in the interim, considered the question in 1998. The answer he gave in his book *Utopistics* was the same, but its import was the opposite. 'Utopias', he wrote in his opening sentences, 'are breeders of illusions and therefore, inevitably, of disillusions. They can be used, and have been used for terrible wrongs. The last thing we really need is still more utopian visions'. In lieu of these, Wallerstein proposes a more modest notion—intending by the term 'utopistics' no more than a 'sober and realistic evaluation' of different feasible ways of organizing society, judged according to their degree of 'substantive rationality'.⁵ He ends by sketching an order he reckons superior to the one we live under today: an economy whose units resemble non-profit institutions like public hospitals, a less unequal if still class society, an ecology that charges costs of damage inflicted on the biosphere to the polluter. Whatever its merits, this is scarcely the end of utopia Marcuse had in mind.

⁴ See *Das Ende der Utopie*, Frankfurt 1980, p.12

⁵ *Utopistics*, New York 1998, p. 1.

What has happened in between the two? Essentially, three decades of nearly unbroken political defeats for every force that once fought against the established order. Intellectually, and imaginatively, that has meant a remorseless closure of space. With good reason Jameson concludes with lines from *Woman on the Edge of Time*, since historically that was perhaps the last utopian work of wide resonance to have been produced in the 20th century. Within three years of its publication, the tide of restoration that is still swelling around us had set in, with the installation of the first post-war regime of the radical right in London. It was Thatcher's rule that coined the new motto of the time: 'there is no alternative'. Soon it was no longer even necessary to proclaim that capitalism was superior to socialism, as if there could be a choice between them—it was the only conceivable social system, coextensive with humanity for all time to come; and so, if we look at the parameters of public debate across the globe, give or take a local euphemism or two, it substantially remains. In these conditions, it is little surprise that not just the political but the utopian itself has been in general suspension since the mid-seventies.

4

But this has not been just a sheer lack. Something has shifted within the recessive utopian combinatory itself. Historically, utopias had four commanding themes. First there was property—the topic More took from Plato, at the very origin of Western political thought. Then came work—play—art, conceived as a single continuum or interchange, from Schiller to Morris. After that arrived sexuality and its consequences: Diderot, Fourier and their descendants. Finally, nature as conquest or companion, Trotsky against Benjamin.⁶ Most utopias, starting with

⁶ Compare: 'Mankind will become accustomed to look at the world as submissive clay for sculpting the most perfect forms of life', learning 'how to build people's palaces on the peaks of Mont Blanc and at the bottom of the Atlantic' (*Literature and Revolution*, Ann Arbor 1971, pp. 251, 254), with 'The mastery of nature (so the imperialists teach) is the purpose of all technology. But who would trust a cane-wielder who proclaimed the mastery of children by adults to be the purpose of education? Is not education, above all, the mastery of the indispensable ordering of the relationship between generations and therefore mastery (if we are to use this term) of that relationship and not of children? Likewise technology is the mastery not of nature but of the relation between nature and man' (*One-Way Street*, in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, Cambridge, MA 1996, p. 487).

Plato's, contained elements touching on more than one of these domains, but each was foregrounded as a principal concern in something like the epochal order described. What has happened to them under the post-modern eclipse that set in now some twenty years ago? Jameson's own work on the cultural logic of late capitalism suggests the relevant answers. What this period has witnessed is not any simple repression of the archetypal utopian themes, but rather—distinctively—their deturpation in a series of caricatures, mimicking and nullifying the hopes or aspirations they once represented.

Thus property: what could be a more democratic magicking away of its traditional limits than the spread of mutual or pension funds, the 'investor civilization' which mobilized so many popular savings behind Enron and WorldCom?⁷ Work and play: could there be a more effortless transcendence of their opposition than the central productive activity of our time, namely speculation—that is, the lofty traditional calling of the free-spirited philosopher? Art and daily life: have they not long become fused in processes of fashion and design shaping every second act of consumption? Sexual liberation: with a nation agog at the most intimate transactions between ruler and intern, not to speak of post-coital penance alongside the most progressive of divines, what sense does it make to talk any more even of repressive desublimation? As for nature, hasn't the Sierra Club long ago taken thought to conserve it? The spirit of the times, well caught by Thomas Frank, has no difficulty projecting its own virtualized utopia.⁸ Think of that advertisement depicting a yuppie lolling at his ease in bed, gazing at NASDAQ on his console, headphones clamped to his ears. Underneath the jubilant caption reads: 'From the Trading Floor to the Dance Floor without Leaving your Pajamas'. Could Guy Debord have improved on it?

But amidst all this revelry, one ancient utopian theme has taken a disquieting turn. For there was always, to use a newly pertinent phrase, a black sheep in the flock of liberating fantasms of a different and better future. Not property, work, art, sex or nature, but science. In Plato and More, the ultimate function of collective ownership is to secure optimal conditions for the life of the mind, but this is still conceived in philosophical—that is, contemplative—or ethical register. It is not till

⁷ See the vivid description in Adam Harmes, 'Mass Investment Culture', NLR 9, May–June 2001, pp. 103–24.

⁸ *One Market under God*, New York 2000, *passim*.

Bacon's *New Atlantis* that science as mastery of the laws of nature, and technology as their use for human purposes, became the supreme value of a utopia. Here was the beginning of a distinct line within the genealogy of utopian traditions, descending through Condorcet, Saint-Simon and Comte down to the communist Bernal and the behaviourist Skinner in the 20th centuries.⁹ What is striking about this pedigree is how early it not only attracted attacks from within the ranks of radicals themselves, but generated its own counter-forms. In the 19th century, on the Left there was Bakunin's furious polemics against Marx for proposing a dictatorship of science; on the Right, Dostoevsky's assault on Chernyshevsky in *Notes from the Underground*; in the Centre, Butler's mock-Darwinian story of machinery in *Erewhon*. In the 20th century, Huxley—an admirer of Butler—made of such reactions a canon with *Brave New World*. The dystopia is not just any anti-utopia. It is a nightmare, specifically, of technological domination: the corruption or distortion of what is most essentially human by malignant use of the powers of science.

By any reckoning of the imaginative or theoretical output of the past two decades, this form has massively outweighed residual utopian impulses. Characteristically, its figurations have fastened onto one particular *topos*: transmogrifications of the body. In the mainstream of utopian literature, the corporeal as such was never a significant datum in the repertoire of change. The human nature to be transformed was social, not biological. But in the scientific variant, there were hints of this from the beginning. Descartes, like Bacon, believed that all outstanding problems in the book of nature would be solved within a few years by science, including ageing and illness—people would soon live centuries rather than decades.¹⁰ Bernal, writing in 1929, looked forward to the shedding of flesh altogether, as human beings became cells of pure cerebration, migrating to the stars.¹¹ Later, Firestone and Piercy contemplated a lifting of the burdens of reproduction from women. But such positive versions were few and far between. The overwhelmingly dominant line here was the dystopian tradition set in place by

⁹ Skinner's *Walden Two*, the last in this line, appeared in 1948.

¹⁰ Descartes 'could not promise to render a man immortal', but was 'quite sure it was possible to lengthen out his life to equal that of the Patriarchs', about a thousand years: (*Oeuvres*, XI, Paris 1962, p. 671). Condorcet's *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (1795) ends on the same note.

¹¹ *The World, The Flesh and the Devil. An Enquiry into the Future of the Three Enemies of the Rational Soul* (reissue), London 1970, pp. 34–46.

Huxley, in which somatic manipulation or manufacture drains existence of freedom and meaning.

Surcharged by the new genetics, it is this imaginary that has proliferated in postmodern times, in the world of prostheses, clones, implants, replicants, projected in cyberpunk and other fiction. The erasure of the boundaries between the organic and mechanical, already foreshadowed in different ways by Mary Shelley or Butler, and more recently given memorable expression by Gibson or Atwood, is now ubiquitous. But if this was long a staple of science fiction, the change today is that the same topoi have now become matters of public policy and official philosophy. Jürgen Habermas's latest book, *The Future of Human Nature*—subtitled ‘Towards a Liberal Eugenics?’—welcomes the potential medical advances of genetic engineering, but shakes its head responsibly over the morality of cloning: would it not amount to a new kind of slavery, impairing the Kantian autonomy of the personality?¹² More pregnantly still, in his newest work *Our Posthuman Future*, Francis Fukuyama revises his diagnosis of the end of history in the light of what he calls the biotechnology revolution. Explaining that he grew up in the fifties under the twin lodestars of *1984* and *Brave New World*, he remarks that, now the spectre of the former has been banished, it is the dangers depicted in the latter—always more subtle and far-sighted—that require our utmost attention.¹³

Here the crux of the change we confront is laid out with diagrammatic clarity. Fukuyama does not rescind his view that history, understood as the development of successive forms of society, has reached its terminus. Nothing can lie beyond liberal-democratic capitalism. At the social level, our institutions are final. Not only all utopias that dreamt of another and better future, but even those dystopias that feared a far worse one, are so many relics of a scarcely to be remembered past. In diametric contrast, on the other hand, at the biological level all is in flux. This is the only layer of life at which the notion of ‘revolution’ retains a meaning. Who knows whether Habermas’s forebodings for human autonomy or—at the other pole—Descartes’s dream of the conquest of death might not be realized? Jameson has famously remarked that people find it easier today

¹² For a bravura rejoinder, see Slavoj Žižek: ‘Bring me my Philips Mental Jacket’, *London Review of Books*, 22 May 2003.

¹³ *Our Posthuman Future. Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*, New York 2002, pp. 1–7.

to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. We can now add: easier too, to imagine the end of identity, or mortality.

5

In an exchange of the mid-sixties, Bloch and Adorno debated the destiny of utopia. Striking an unaccustomed note, Adorno declared that 'Inwardly, everyone knows, whether they admit it or not, that things could be otherwise. People could live not only without hunger and probably without fear, but as free beings'. But utopia involved something more than this. Its 'neuralgic point is the question of the abolition of death'. For the *bien-pensants*, that prospect was like 'throwing a stone at a police station and seeing a guard instantly emerge'—'the immediate reaction to the notion people might no longer die is that nothing could be worse or more horrifying'. Yet without this threshold, utopia could not be thought, for death was 'none other than the violence of what simply is', identification with which such fear of lifting it betrayed. Yet just that was the metaphysical reason why utopia could be spoken of only negatively. Any affirmative image of it must be untrue to this inherent tension.¹⁴

No scientific progress could alter that prohibition. For utopia could not be segmented. Its meaning was 'the change of the whole', and mere medical advance—as if the cancellation of mortality were simply a matter of 'crossing the threshold between organic and inorganic life through further discoveries'—would by itself have no more significance for it than television or supersonic flight. The utopian imperative was a transfiguration of *all* the categories of existence, not just one. Bloch did not dissent, though he stressed the differing conceptions of social plenty and natural law in which happiness and freedom had respectively been imagined, as distinct constituents of the dream of another world. But the final emphasis was his own. The spur to utopian longing came from the bare words heard in *Mahagonny*: 'something is missing'. They contained no promise of anything better, only a desire. The principle for which Bloch is remembered ensured that. 'Hope is the

¹⁴ 'Etwas fehlt . . . Über die Widersprüche der utopischen Sehnsucht' (1964), in Ernst Bloch, *Tendenz-Latenz-Utopie*, Frankfurt 1978, pp. 353–61. *Minima Moralia* is the expression of these injunctions.

opposite of security, of a naive optimism. Within it always lurks the category of danger'.¹⁵

6

Forty years later, it is not hope but its antonym that haunts the idea of an alternative order. With the approach of genetic engineering, the fear before utopia on which Jameson dwells—at the idea of a loss of the constituted self—has acquired a new and sharper edge. Against this background, the ironic minimalism of the utopian demand he poses, full employment across the world, is all the more pointed as a simple political arrow. The first condition of any revival of the utopian imagination would be to regain the social ground, of institutions and ideologies, systems and states. For its part, the biological ground can no longer—if it ever could—be left to those devoted or resigned to the established order of capital; it will have to be invested in new ways too. In all of this, a kind of judo effect can be expected from the very insistence surrounding us that capitalism is immutable. That could be seen already in the virtually universal unease, even among those who shared his political outlook, aroused by Fukuyama's original announcement of the end of history. The tedium of what will always be the same is not a good calling card. In Baudrillard's words: 'The allergy to any definitive order, to any conclusive power, is happily universal'.¹⁶

No thinker understood that more deeply than Fourier. His utopia was founded on a theory of human passions—'the mistresses of the world', as he described them. Of these, the three most precious were the Cabalist, the Composite and the Butterfly. The Cabalist was the spirit of intrigue, by which he set much store: we might call it the ingenuities of political calculation. The Composite was the enthusiasm for combining pleasures of existence, physical and spiritual, social and somatic. The Butterfly was the ineradicable human desire for change as such—for variation of hopes and horizons, diversity of senses and scenes. 'It is the passion', he wrote, 'which in the social mechanism holds the highest rank; it is the universal agent of transition. The complete expression of this passion gives rise to a form of happiness attributed to the Parisian

¹⁵ *Tendenz-Latenz-Utopie*, pp. 366–67

¹⁶ *L'esprit du terrorisme*, Paris 2002, p. 12.

sybarites': 'the art of living so well and so fast'.¹⁷ In his day, people were astonished that Fourier could take the butterfly as such an emblem of change; today, chaos theory would be less surprised.

Classically, utopias were imagined as islands, enclaves or colonies—delimited spaces, either segregated within the world, or projected beyond it. Today, would not the appropriate utopia have to be globalized, the whole earth brought under the wing of that butterfly, fluttering so well and so fast? But we can also envisage the renewal of utopian energies more historically. No-one has captured that other tempo more strikingly than Jameson, in one of those unexpected sentences that are his signature. It comes from *Brecht and Method*, where he writes:

Stasis today, all over the world—in the twin condition of market and globalization, commodification and financial speculation—does not even take on a baleful religious sense of an implacable human nature; but it certainly seems to have outstripped any place for human agency, and to have rendered the latter obsolete. That is why a Brechtian conception of activity must go hand in hand with a revival of the older precapitalist sense of time itself, of the change or flowing of all things, for it is the movement of this great river of time or the Tao that will slowly carry us downstream again to the moment of praxis.¹⁸

Lao Tse floating towards Marx. Is the torrent of capital now churning too fast for such a rendezvous? Later, Jameson raises that objection himself. Others might question the paradox of an activism delivered by a drift with the stream. But the power of the image remains. It requires no *attentisme*. The *Tao Te Ching* is also a cry of social anger, a *ça ira* of its times. 'Exterminate benevolence, discard righteousness'—'the people will be a hundred times better off'.¹⁹ Few words knock so sharply on our door, in an age of institutional piety of which Confucius could only have dreamt. Should we call them too utopian?

¹⁷ *Le Nouveau Monde Industriel et Sociitaire*, in *Oeuvres*, vol. II, Paris 1845, pp. 145–46.

¹⁸ *Brecht and Method*, London–New York 1998, p. 4.

¹⁹ *Tao Te Ching* §19. Appropriately, Le Guin has produced her own version of its 'indestructibly outrageous' maxims: Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Boston 1997.

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GRAPHS, MAPS, TREES

Abstract Models for Literary History—2

THERE IS A very simple question, about literary maps: what exactly do they *do*? What do they do that cannot be done with words, that is; because, if it can be done with words, then maps are superfluous. Take Bakhtin's essay on the chrono-topos: it is the greatest study ever written on space and narrative, and it doesn't have a single map. Carlo Dionisotti's *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana*, the same. Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City*, the same. Henri Lafon's *Espaces romanesques du XVIIe siècle*... Do maps *add* anything, to our knowledge of literature?

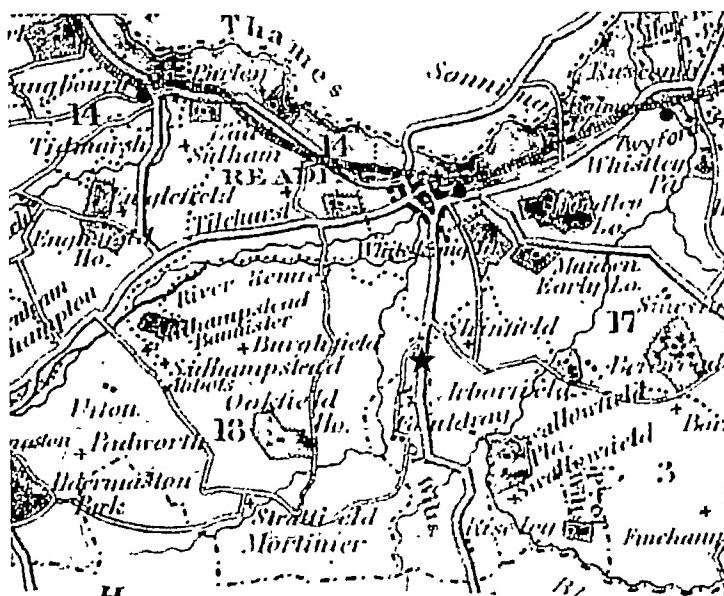
I

Village stories were a popular British genre of the first quarter of the nineteenth century, peaking with Mary Mitford's *Our Village*, published in five volumes between 1824 and 1832. The village was Three Mile Cross, in Berkshire (figure 1, overleaf), a dozen miles south of Reading, on the road to Hampshire; and the road is explicitly foregrounded in Mitford's opening sketch, where it also forms the basis for her presentation of the village as one house after another along a 'straggling, winding street'. So you think, 'Yonville',¹ and imagine this village of two or three hundred people as a mere site of transit between larger places (*Effi Briest*: 'no, the Gdansk–Berlin express does not stop here...'). Easy.

Then you make a map of the book, and everything changes. The twenty-four stories of Mitford's first volume, figure 2 shows, arrange themselves in a little solar system, with the village at the centre of the pattern, and two

roughly concentric rings around it. The first ring is closer to the village, and focuses largely on personal relationships ('Ellen', 'Hannah', 'Cousin Mary'); the second ring, more numerous, is at a distance of a couple of miles, and emphasizes natural spectacles ('Frost and thaw', 'Violeting', 'The first primrose'), plus collective events like cricket and maying. But in both cases the road 'from B- to S-', so present at the beginning of the book, has disappeared: narrative space is not linear here, it is *circular*. Which is surprising: while mapping nineteenth-century genres for the *Atlas of the European Novel* I encountered all sorts of shapes—linear trajectories, binary fields, triangulations, multi-polar stories—but never a circular pattern. Where on earth do these rings come from?

FIGURE 1: *Three Mile Cross*



★ *Three Mile Cross*

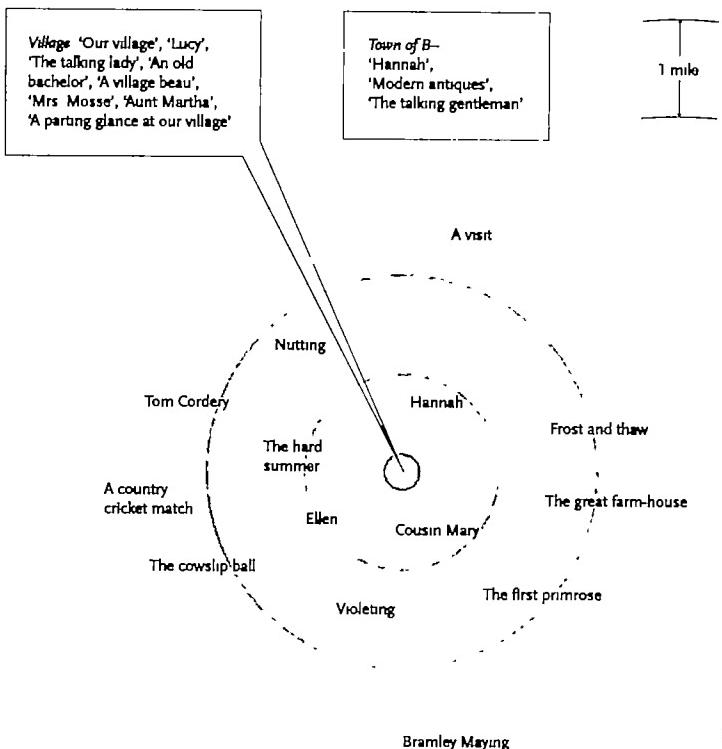
A small neighbourhood is as good in sober waking reality as in poetry or prose, a village neighbourhood, such as this Berkshire hamlet in which I write, a long, straggling, winding street, at the bottom of a fine eminence, with a road through it, always abounding in carts, horsemen and carriages, and lately enlivened by a stage-coach from B- to S-

Mary Mitford, 'Our Village'

Source: Thomas Moule, *The English Counties delineated* [1837], London 1994

'There is nothing further to see in Yonville. The street, the only one, about a gun-shot in length, with a few shops on each side . . .' (*Madame Bovary*, II.1)

FIGURE 2: Mary Mitford, *Our Village*, volume I [1824]



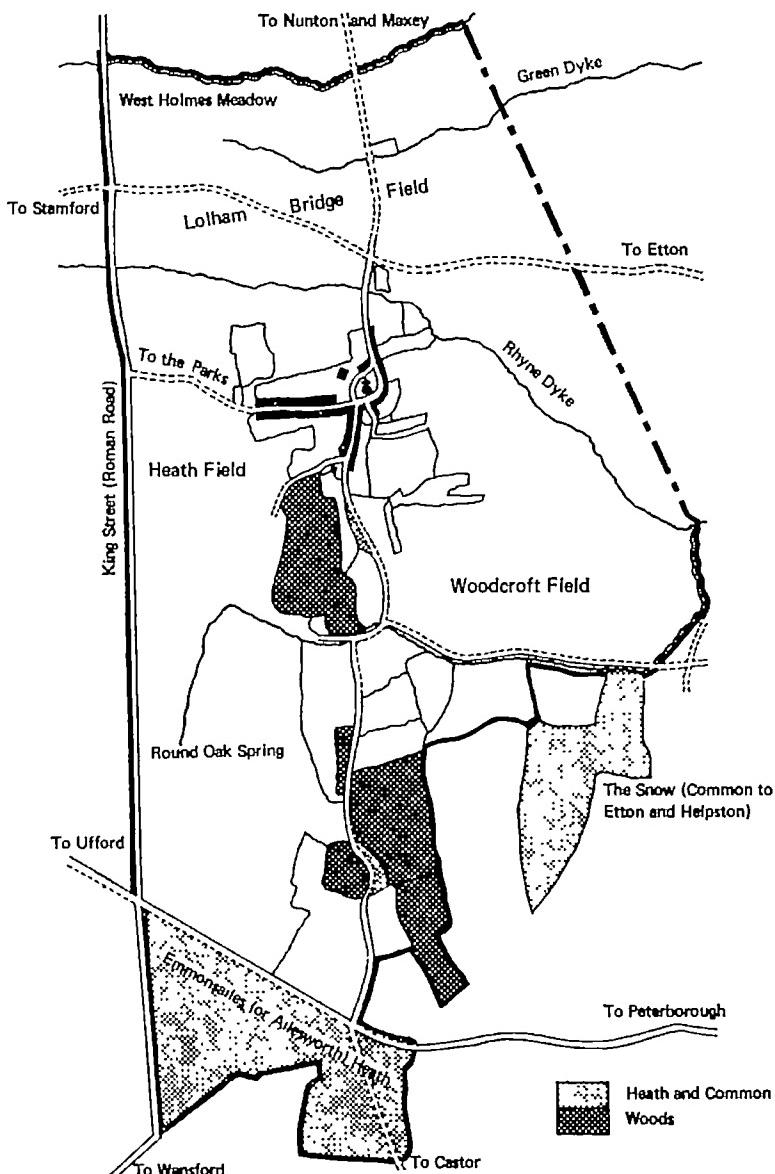
II

John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730–1840*:

There is a sense in which an open-field parish in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries [which is exactly what the one in *Our Village* is like] could be said to have a different geography according to who was looking at it: thus, for those of its inhabitants who rarely went beyond the parish boundary, the parish itself was so to speak at the centre of the landscape ... For those inhabitants accustomed to moving outside it, however, and for those travellers who passed through it, the parish was . . . defined not by some circular system of geography but by a linear one.²

² John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730–1840*, Cambridge 1972, p. 95. For the sources of the two Helpston maps (figures 3–4), see pp. 225–7.

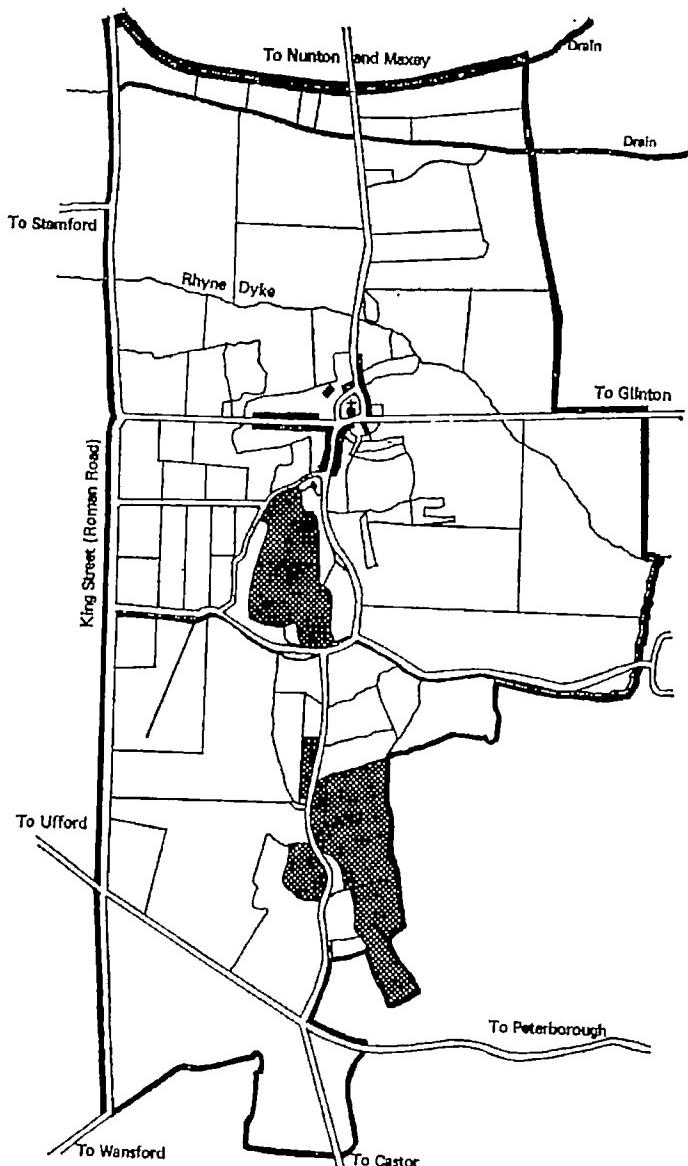
FIGURE 3: *The parish of Helpston in 1809, before the enclosure*



The characteristic sense of space which the topography and organization of an open-field parish created was circular, while the landscape of parliamentary enclosure expressed a more linear sense . . . the village of Helpston is at the centre of the parish, where the three fields of the parish come together they form around the settlement a rough circle, which represents the area in which the villagers work and move.

John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730–1840*

FIGURE 4: *The parish of Helpston in 1820, after the enclosure*



Priest's idea of a road is that it should be threaded through one village and another like a string through beads: he thinks of the road as in some sense prior to the villages on it, and not of the villages existing separately first.

John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730–1840*

A circular 'system of geography', and a linear one: behind these two perspectives, lies the dramatic transformation of rural space produced by parliamentary enclosure, which Barrell has so well visualized in his two maps of Helpston, and where a perceptual system centered in the isolated village is replaced by an abstract network of roads (figures 3–4). Against this background, *Our Village*'s spatial pattern becomes much clearer: by opening with a linear perspective, and then shifting to a circular one, Mitford reverses the direction of history, making her urban readers (*Our Village* was published by Whitaker, Ave-Maria-Lane, London) look at the world according to the older, 'centered' viewpoint of an unenclosed village. And the key to this perceptual shift lies in Mitford's most typical episode: the country walk. Story after story, the young narrator leaves the village, each time in a different direction, reaches the destinations charted in figure 2, then turns around and goes home. 'When a system is free to spread its energy in space', writes Rudolf Arnheim, 'it sends out its vectors evenly all around, like the rays emanating from a source of light. The resulting . . . pattern is the prototype of *centric composition*'.³ Exactly: out of the free movements of *Our Village*'s narrator, spread evenly all around like the petals of a daisy, a circular pattern crystallizes—as it does, we shall see, in *all* village stories, of which it constitutes the fundamental chronotope. But in order to see this pattern, we must first extract it from the narrative flow, and one way to do so is with a map. Not, of course, that the map is already an explanation; but at least it shows us that there is something *that needs to be explained*. One step at a time.

III

A rounded pattern in Helpston before the enclosure; and a rounded pattern in *Our Village*. But with a difference: in Mitford's walks, Barrell's 'rough circle . . . in which the villagers work and move' is rewritten as a space of *leisure* rather than work. Slow easy strolls, thoughtless, happy, in the company of a greyhound called May; all around, a countryside full of picturesque natural views, but where very few people are actually doing anything. Decorative: for each page devoted to agricultural labour, there must be twenty on flowers and trees, described with meticulous precision. If urban readers are made to share the village's perception of space, then, it's also true that this space has been thoroughly *gentrified*; as if

³ Rudolf Arnheim, *The power of the center. A study of composition in the visual arts*, new version, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1988, p. 4.

Mitford had travelled forward in time, and discovered what city-dwellers will want to find in the countryside during a brief week-end visit. Not surprisingly, country walks were by far the most popular part of *Our Village*, and remained long in print by themselves while the rest was forgotten.

Behind the similarity of figures 2 and 3, then, lie very different experiences of social space. Barrell's 1809 'system of geography' corresponds to the omnipresent, half submerged culture of daily routines—position of the fields, local paths, perception of distances, horizon—which historians tend to call *mentalité*, and which is often entwined with the performance of material labour. Mitford's neat stylization of rural space, however—with its alchemical transmutation of the 'rough circle' of work into a ring of pleasure—is not *mentalité*, but rather *ideology*: the world-view of a different social actor (an urban visitor), whose movements duplicate the perimeter of rural *mentalité*, while completely reversing its symbolic associations.

A map of ideology emerging from a map of *mentalité*, emerging from the material substratum of the physical territory. Granted, things are not always so neat. But when they are, it's interesting.

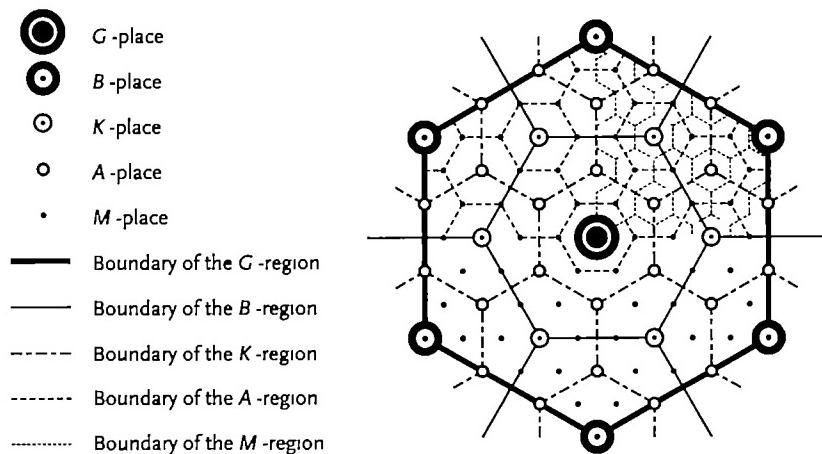
IV

A 'stylization' of space was quite clearly the secret aim of the German geographer Walter Christaller in his ambitious study on *Central places in Southern Germany*. Written in the early 1930s, the book explains the spatial distribution of urban centres on the basis of the social division of labour: towns provide specialized services, writes Christaller ('banking, administration, cultural and spiritual offerings [church, school, theatre, professional and business organizations], sanitation'), which in order to reach as many customers as possible are located in 'a few necessarily central points, to be consumed at many scattered points'.⁴ The

⁴ Walter Christaller, *Central places in Southern Germany* [1933], Englewood Cliffs, NJ 1966, p. 20. Christaller's model presupposes an 'isotropic' space, where movement can occur with equal ease in every direction; this is of course a theoretical abstraction, whose validity is limited to homogeneous agricultural flatlands (like indeed much of Southern Germany). The assumption of an isotropic space is the common denominator between Christaller's theory and the structure of village narratives; I briefly discuss the problematic nature of this idea in footnote 12 below.

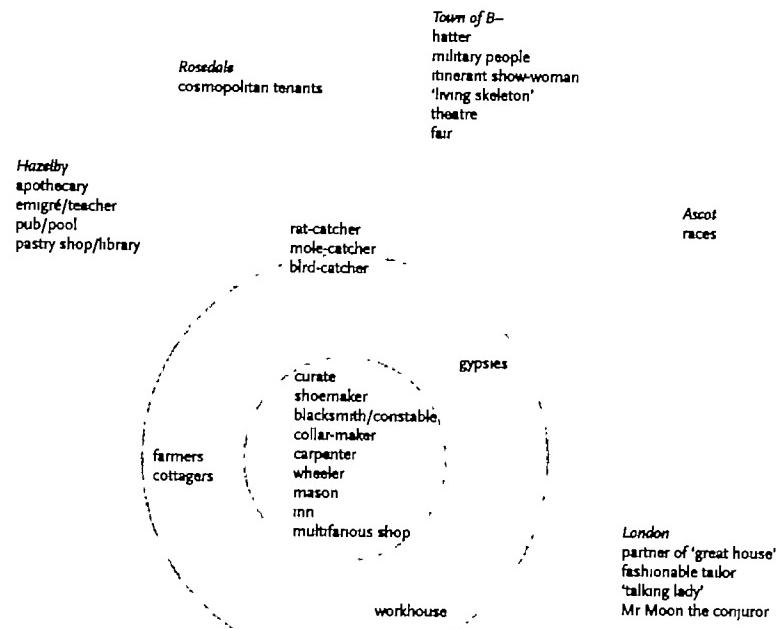
more specialized a service is, the more ‘central’ it also is, and on this socio-geometrical principle arises the urban hierarchy synthesized by Christaller himself in figure 5. The rule here is simple: around each G-centre of the first rank there is a ‘market region’ which includes six B-centres of the second rank, with fewer and less specialized services; around each B-centre there are six K-centres of the third rank, and so on, in a series of smaller and smaller hexagons that subdivide the territory according to the principle of ‘close packing’. At the very bottom of the hierarchy, with a radius between one and three kilometres—a walk in *Our Village*—lies what the book calls the ‘region of the lowest order’; and figure 6, Christaller-like, charts the services offered by Mitford’s village, and by the other places mentioned in her book.

FIGURE 5: *Central Places*



Source *Central places in Southern Germany*

In the village: shoemaker, blacksmith, carpenter, mason; in London and the other towns: French teachers, hatters, fashionable tailors, horse races. Serious daily needs versus frivolous superfluities: this is Mitford’s social geography. Its roots are in one of the most ancient, and most widespread, of narrative forms: the idyll. ‘Birth, labour, love, marriage, death’, wrote Bakhtin of this *longue durée* chronotope: ‘only a few of life’s basic realities . . . a little world . . . sufficient unto itself, not linked

FIGURE 6: Mary Mitford, *Our Village*: Spatial division of labour

In *Our Village*, the curate, shoemaker, or inn are centripetal services, whereas rat-, mole- and bird-catcher—who are encountered outside of the village, and whose occupation lies, practically and symbolically, on the border between the human and the natural world—are instances of the older type, like the memorable 'reddleman' of *The Return of the Native*. The village's weak division of labour produces also many all-purpose entities like the 'multifarious bazaar' of the village shop, the blacksmith who doubles as a constable, or characters such as John Wilson, 'a handy fellow, who could do any sort of work—thatcher, carpenter, bricklayer, painter, gardener, gamekeeper . . .'

in any intrinsic way with other places.'⁵ Sufficient unto itself: this is why village stories organize themselves in circular patterns: a circle is a simple, 'natural' form, which maximizes the proximity of each point to the centre of the 'little world', while simultaneously sealing it off from the vast universe that lies outside its perimeter. 'Sugar and coffee and salt: we wanted nothing else from the outside world', declares proudly the protagonist of a German village story of the same period, Auerbach's *Brigitta*. But the past tense of that 'wanted' is a sign that the days of the idyll are numbered.

V

The changing geography of village narratives is particularly clear in another book of the 1820s, John Galt's *Annals of the Parish* (1821). The parish is Dalmailing, near the west coast of Scotland, and the text covers the half century from 1760 to 1810: each year a chapter, where the minister Balwhidder registers the main events in the crowded and often confusing mode of annalistic writing (fires, weddings, wars, births, portents . . .), of which the first ten years of the book—charted in figure 7—offer a typical instance. Here, from the still idyllic daily life of Dalmailing, in the bottom left corner ('birth, labour, marriage, death . . .'), we can follow two possible threads through the figure's materials. The first runs through Irville (Irvine), Glasgow, and Edinburgh, and shows the system of central places at work: school in Irville, university in Glasgow, lawyers and doctors in Edinburgh; second-hand news in Irville, and first-hand news in Glasgow; celebration dinner, honeymoon, marble headstone . . . As services become more unusual, they move 'up' in the urban hierarchy, and further away from Dalmailing; but since Galt's world is still fundamentally one of simple everyday needs, such services are seldom required, and central places like Edinburgh or London remain barely visible.

Extremely visible on the other hand are the many 'novelties' listed in the second column from the left, which reach the parish from the West Indies, the Baltic, and other unspecified places. Behind them is the British empire, of course, but perhaps even more the sheer fact of *distance*: in Dalmailing, a parrot, Rososolus, or a *cocker-nut* (Balwhidder's half-Dutch

⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel', 1937–38, in *The dialogic imagination*, Austin 1981, p. 225.

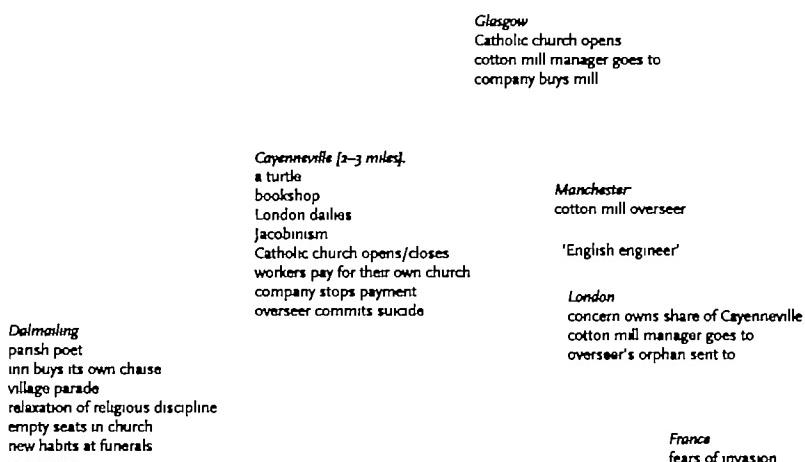
FIGURE 7: John Galt, *Annals of the Parish: first decade [1760-69]*

America rumours of rebellion	Norway expansion of coal trade
Inland 'wild Irish seeking work'	
Dalmating Daily life	Glasgow [5 miles] goes to university
arrival of pastor	brother-in-law goes to college
arrival of Mrs Malcolm	news [first hand]
Married	cheese to market [occasionally]
Illegitimate children born	new schoolmistress
twins born	honeymoon
twin calves born	many useful things
smallpox	mantua-making
'natural wonder' [a toad]	
pastor's patron dies	
old schoolmaster dies	
pastor's wife dies	
distiller of herbs dies	
schoolmistress dies	
burning of the mill	
fire on local estate	
school closes/reopens	
smuggling	
haberdasher's shop opens	
king's road mended	
Indile [2-3 miles] children to school	Venous vials [5-10 miles north]
tea	finds first wife
pear tree	finds second wife
parrot	smuggling
coconut	seaman
donkey	shipmaster lost at sea
manimaking	couplins sink
new names for children	
Riga balsam	
Rosotius	
Dantock cordial	
first Dalmating sailor	
alehouse	
	Syrups
	London
	Lord Eggesham visits his lands
France	
prisoner returns	
man returns from war academy	
'contrivances' of French military	
India a nabob	

spelling for coconut) are truly things from another world. Wonders. Or, more prosaically, luxuries; products of long-distance trade which shine for a moment on the horizon of the everyday, leaving behind a sense of incommensurable universes: on the one side birth, labour, marriage, and death; on the other, coconut, Riga balsam, parrot, and Danzig cordial. Home, and the World. But since the world does not really change everyday existence (its wonders are all singular: one donkey, one coconut, one bottle of this and that), the antithesis is at once radical, and totally irrelevant: wonders appear, are admired, and then vanish (except for tea, of course). The world is an astonishing place, but the Dalmatian idyll goes on as it always has, 'not linked in any intrinsic way to other places'.

But in 1788 a cotton-mill is built—‘nothing like it had been seen before in our day and generation’—and with it the manufacturing town of Cayenneville, and the parish’s spatial coordinates are forever changed. If one compares the first decade of the book with the last one, charted in figure 8, it’s impossible to miss the dramatic *re-centering* of social life induced by manufacture: the sense of the ‘region’, so strong a generation

FIGURE 8: John Galt, *Annals of the Parish: last decade [1801-10]*



Year 1801 It is often to me very curious food for meditation, that as the parish increased in population, there should have been less cause for matter to record. Things that in former days would have occasioned great discourse and cogitation, are forgotten, with the day in which they happen . . .

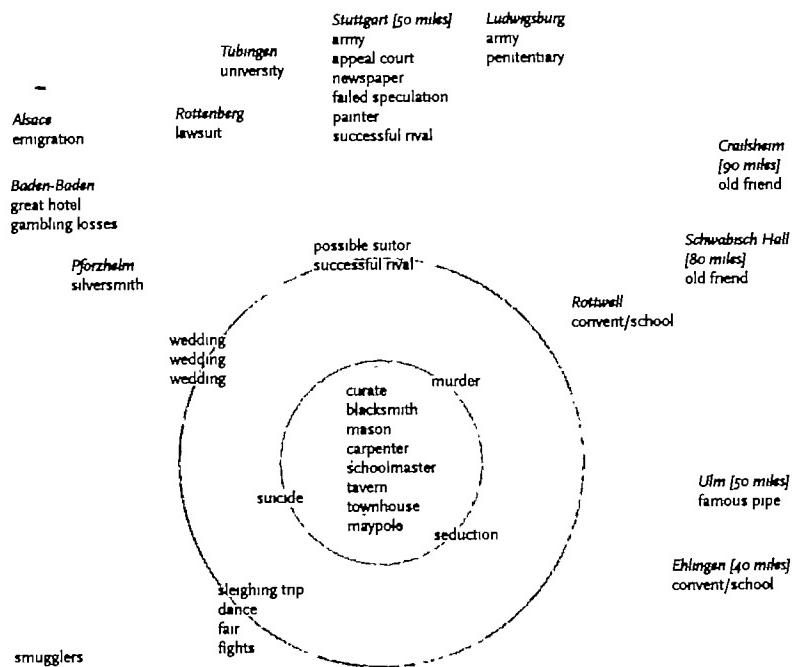
earlier—Dalmaling's daily life, the Irville where children went to school, the villages where spouses came from . . .—is gone, replaced by a ‘web of commercial reciprocities’ (Cayenneville–Glasgow–Manchester–London), whose ‘every touch or stir [is] felt in our corner’ (year 1808). Between Home and the World, a new spatial reality has wedged itself, subordinating them both: the national market, whose intermediate distance is traversed every week, if not day, by those *regular novelties*—books, newspapers, politics: all plurals—which will keep multiplying throughout the industrial nineteenth century. From the old Age of Wonders, only a turtle survives.

VI

One last collection, German this time. Berthold Auerbach's *Black Forest Village Stories*, written between 1843 and 1853, were among the great bestsellers of the century, and figure 9 (overleaf) charts about one third of the *Dorfgeschichten* collected in Cotta's 1940 ten-volume edition. Here, too, three spaces interact and compete for attention. The first is composed by Nordstetten and the other Black Forest villages, and its features should by now be familiar: narrow geographic range, daily needs, basic services—all contained within the same circular pattern we have encountered in Britain. But if the spatial logic of the idyll is more or less the same everywhere (probably because of its extreme narrative simplicity), Auerbach's international space is already quite different from Mitford's or Galt's: instead of sporadic wonders, we find war memories (Germany as ‘the battlefield of Europe’, in Thomas Mann's words), threats of economic competition, and especially the *basso continuo* of emigration (America, first of all; then Switzerland, France, Greece, Russia, Spain . . .). Except for Switzerland, which is very close, the narrative never actually *moves* into these foreign countries, but the voices of those who have left echo in almost every story, presenting the world as a concrete alternative to life at home; in the most optimistic moments—like the founding of ‘Nordstetten, Ohio’—as truly a second home.

But in the meantime, just as earlier in Galt, a third, quasi-national space (‘quasi’, because German unity is still a generation away), is forcing its way into village life through ‘central places’ such as Horb, Freiburg, Rottenburg and Stuttgart. What we find there, though, is not manufacture, as in Britain, but lawcourts, jails, army barracks, and the like. The state.

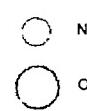
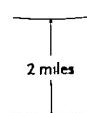
FIGURE 9: Berthold Auerbach, Black Forest Village Stories [1843–53]



Freiburg
lawsuit
corpse dissection

Neustadt
old friend

Horb
army
jail
jail
law court
grammar school
doctor
land surveyor
recruiting officer
wedding clothes
gambling losses



USA	France	Switzerland
emigration	invading army	emigration
emigration	competition	emigration
emigration		competition
emigration	Spain	
emigration	brother dies	
competition	beloved runs away	
swindler	emigration	
	emigration	
Brazil	Greece	Russia
lawsuit	failed speculation	emigration
ruins villager		villagers die
		special clock
		Balkans
		villager turns Turk

The state *as repression*: a grim determination to achieve the monopoly of legitimate violence that outlaws regional traditions, drafts people against their will, takes them to court, jails them if they run away . . . ‘You have ordered and commanded so much that there is nothing left to be ordered or commanded’, complains the representative of Nordstetten to a county judge in the story ‘Good government’: ‘and you will end up by putting a policeman under every tree to keep it from quarrelling with the wind and drinking too much when it rains’.⁶ Here, even rivals in love—gamekeepers, soldiers, land-surveyors—belong to repressive bodies.

The formation of nation-states entailed a conflict between national and local loyalties, wrote Charles Tilly, and here it is: the local loyalty towards an older, smaller homeland stubbornly resisting its integration into the Germany to come. *Heimat* against *Vaterland*; the collective rituals so dear to Auerbach (and Mitford); *our* village; *our* society (the title of the first chapter of *Cranford*, Elizabeth Gaskell’s village collection, whose last word is *us*). ‘To be authorized to say *we!*’, exclaims Mitford in ‘A country cricket match’; and if one traces the diffusion of this pronoun in 19th-century culture, two forms—two *rival* forms of collective identity—immediately stand out from the rest: village stories, and national anthems.⁷ That the local form leans towards the more proximate and ‘inclusive’ form (*we* as *I + you*), and the national anthem towards the more martial, ‘exclusive’ one (*we* as *I + they versus you: war, enemy, glory . . .*), is the apt final touch to their symbolic opposition.

⁶ Then, more threateningly “‘You want to take everything from us: now, there happens to be one thing our minds are made up to hold on to.’ Raising his axe and gnashing his teeth he continued: ‘And if I must split every door between me and the king with this very axe, I will not give it out of my hand. From time immemorial it is our right to carry axes’.”

⁷ Of twenty-eight European anthems I have been able to check, twenty-two establish a significant semantic field around the first person plural, beginning of course with the very first word—*Allons*—of the greatest of them all. Nothing seems as essential to national anthems as this grammatical sign of collective identity; even the name of the country receives fewer mentions (20), while the semantic field of ‘glory’ has 19, ‘past’ and ‘war’ 15, ‘enemy’ and ‘nature’ 13, and ‘God’ a mere 12. Interestingly enough, the three European anthems older than the *Marseillaise*—the Dutch, English, and Danish anthems: ‘William of Nassau’, ‘God Save the Queen’, and ‘King Christian’—all foreground the figure of the sovereign, and show no interest in the first person plural (except for ‘God Save the Queen’, which however places it in the object position: ‘long to reign over us’, ‘God save us all’, ‘may she defend our laws’). The difference between a dynastic and a collective basis for national identity is beautifully captured by this grammatical detail.

In their animosity towards national centralization, village stories diverge sharply from the provincial novels with which they are often confused, and are, if anything, much closer to regional novels—as is clear in Auerbach's explicit conjunction (*Village* stories of the *Black Forest*), or later in Hardy. ‘The region is a place in itself’, writes Ian Duncan, ‘the source of its own terms of meaning and identity . . . while the province is defined by its difference from [the capital].’⁸ Exactly: village and region are alternative homelands of sorts, whereas the provinces embody the capitulation of local reality to the national centre: Emma Bovary’s idea that life is ‘*quelque chose de sublime*’ in Paris (or Madrid, or Moscow), and a desert everywhere else.⁹ Like the *provinciae* of antiquity, subject to Rome but denied full citizenship, the provinces are ‘negative’ entities, defined by what is not there; which also explains, by the way, why one cannot map provincial novels—you cannot map what is not there. It happens, there are un-mappable forms (Christmas stories are another one, for different reasons), and these setbacks, disappointing at first, are actually the sign of a method still in touch with reality: geography is a useful tool, yes, but does not explain *everything*. For that, we have astrology and ‘Theory’.

VII

What do literary maps do . . . First, they are a good way to prepare a text for analysis. You choose a unit—walks, lawsuits, luxury goods, whatever—find its occurrences, place them in space . . . or in other words: you *reduce* the text to a few elements, and *abstract* them, and construct a new, *artificial* object. A model. And at this point you start working at a ‘secondary’ level, removed from the text: a map, after all, is always a look from afar—or is useless, like Borges’s map of the empire. Distant reading, I have called this work elsewhere; where distance is however not an obstacle, but a specific form of knowledge: fewer elements, hence a sharper sense of their overall interconnection. Shapes, relations, structures. Patterns.

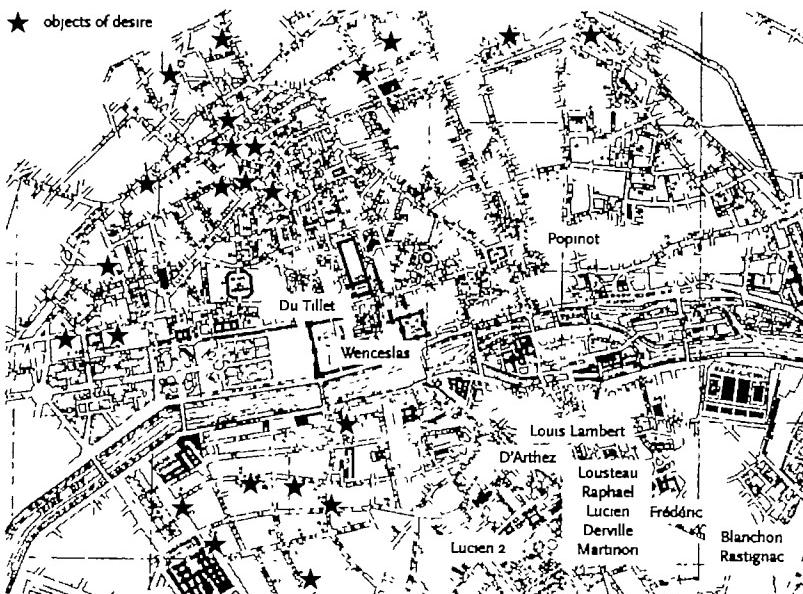
⁸ Ian Duncan, ‘The Provincial or Regional Novel’, in Patrick Brantlinger and William Thesing, eds., *A companion to the Victorian novel*, Oxford 2002.

⁹ If London does not enjoy the same mythical status as other European capitals, the reason is probably that the English provinces were more self-confident than their continental counterparts, especially after ‘their’ industrial revolutions (Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield . . .). The hollow sense of unreality of Emma Bovary, or Ana de Ozores, or the three Prozorov sisters is thus hard to imagine in places like Milton or Middlemarch: full of problems, to be sure, but where life is absolutely real.

And patterns are indeed what I have been discussing throughout this article. But are they also the proper object of geographical study? In an intelligent critique of the *Atlas of the European Novel*, the Italian geographer Claudio Cerretti has questioned this assumption, pointing out how patterns entail a Cartesian reduction of space to extension, where 'objects are analysed in terms of reciprocal positions and distances . . . whether they are close or far from each other or from something else'. But this, he goes on, is not really geography: this is geometry; just as the figures of the *Atlas* are not really maps, but diagrams. The diagrams look like maps, yes, because they have been 'superimposed on a cartographic plane': but their true nature emerges unmistakably from the way I analyse them, which disregards the specificity of the various locations, to focus almost entirely on their mutual relations; which is indeed the way to read diagrams, but certainly not maps.¹⁰

Let me give you an instance of what Cerretti means. Figure 10, reproduced from the *Atlas*, is a map of young protagonists of Parisian novels, and of their objects of desire; and I remember the little epiphany I had in front of this figure, when I realized that most young men live on one side

FIGURE 10: *Protagonists of Parisian novels, and objects of their desire*



¹⁰ Claudio Cerretti, *Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana*, 1998, pp. 141–8.

of the Seine, and their lovers on the opposite side. The epiphany, in other words, was *Paris as diagram*:¹¹ a set of relations, not a cluster of individual locations. I could see that the young men were in the Latin Quarter, of course, and the women in the crescent from the Faubourg St-Germain to the Chaussée d'Antin, and I accounted for it; but without enthusiasm. These specific positions seemed to be the premise of cartography, more than its result. Locations *as such* did not seem that significant, if compared to the *relations* that the map had revealed among them.

Relations among locations as more significant than locations as such . . . But for geography, locations as such *are* significant; geography is not just 'extension' (Cerreti again), but 'intension' too: 'the *quality* of a given space . . . the stratification of *intrinsically different qualities* and heterogeneous phenomena': the Latin Quarter *as Latin Quarter*, in other words, and not only in its opposition to the Chaussée d'Antin. And he is right, of course, and the reason I kept 'forgetting' geography for geometry was, first of all, ignorance: in order to write the *Atlas* I had studied some cartography, but had learned it only up to a point, and so I made mistakes. True. But if I kept making diagrams, and still do—the figures in this article are *all* diagrams, which I decided not to 'superimpose' on maps of Berkshire or south-western Germany to make the point more clear—if I keep making diagrams it's because for me *geometry 'signifies' more than geography*.¹²

¹¹ Or better, again, as a succession of diagrams (figures 46abcd in the *Atlas*): first, where the young men settle, second, what they desire; third, where they indulge in their fantasies; fourth, where they end up. Each map photographed a particular stage in the plot. *Atlas of the European Novel*, London 1998, pp. 96–99.

¹² Geometry signifies *more* than geography: but it seldom signifies *by itself*. Here, the choice of village stories as the basis of this theoretical sketch may have been unfortunate, as the isotropic space which is so typical of this genre tends to over-emphasize the role of geometry at the expense of geography: a fact I became aware of only after long, detailed exchanges with Claudio Cerreti and Jacques Lévy (who have all my gratitude, and shouldn't be held in the least responsible for the views I am expressing). In fact, the most common type of literary map (in the *Atlas of the European Novel*, at any rate) looks less like those of *Our Village* than like that of Parisian novels, where the geometrical pattern is distorted by the specificity of Paris's social geography—as is particularly clear in the case of those three characters who start on the 'wrong' side of the Seine. (For two of them, Du Tillet and Popinot, the explanation is simple: they belong to the space of trade rather than to that of intellectual life in the Latin Quarter; for the third character, Wenceslas, I cannot find a satisfying reason.) On a related note, I have encountered Hervé Le Bras's splendid *Essai de géométrie sociale* (Paris 2000) too late to discuss its extremely suggestive ideas in this article.

More, because a geometrical pattern is too orderly a shape to be the product of chance. It is a sign that something is at work here—that something has *made* the pattern the way it is.

But what?

VIII

'The form of any portion of matter, whether it be living or dead', writes D'Arcy Thompson in his strange wonderful book *On Growth and Form*, 'may in all cases alike be described as due to the action of force. In short, the form of an object is a "diagram of forces" . . .'¹³ Diagram: Cartesian space. But diagram of forces. The distribution of events between the Black Forest villages and the administrative towns is the diagram of a conflict between local forces and national ones; Mitford's rings, the result of the village's gravitational pull over her perambulating narrator; Balzac's divided Paris, the battlefield between old wealth and ambitious petty bourgeois youth. Each pattern is a clue—a fingerprint of history, almost. 'The form of an object is a "diagram of forces", in this sense, at least, that from it we can . . . deduce the forces that . . . have acted upon it'. Deducing from the *form* of an object the *forces* that have been at work: this is the most elegant definition ever of what literary sociology should be. And for D'Arcy Thompson these forces are of two basic kinds: internal, and external. 'The structure in its final form is, as it were, the inner nucleus molded in various ways by the characteristics of the outer element', wrote Goethe (whom D'Arcy Thompson is here following): 'it is precisely thus that the animal retains its viability in the outer world: it is shaped from without as well as from within.'¹⁴

Shaped from without, as well as from within . . . But so is narrative. On this, the five volumes of *Our Village* offer a splendid test case. In the 1824 volume, remember, the village was the undisputed centre of the surrounding countryside: the centripetal effects of the force 'from within' were omnipresent, while the force 'from without' was nowhere to be seen: the narrator moved freely in every direction in her little

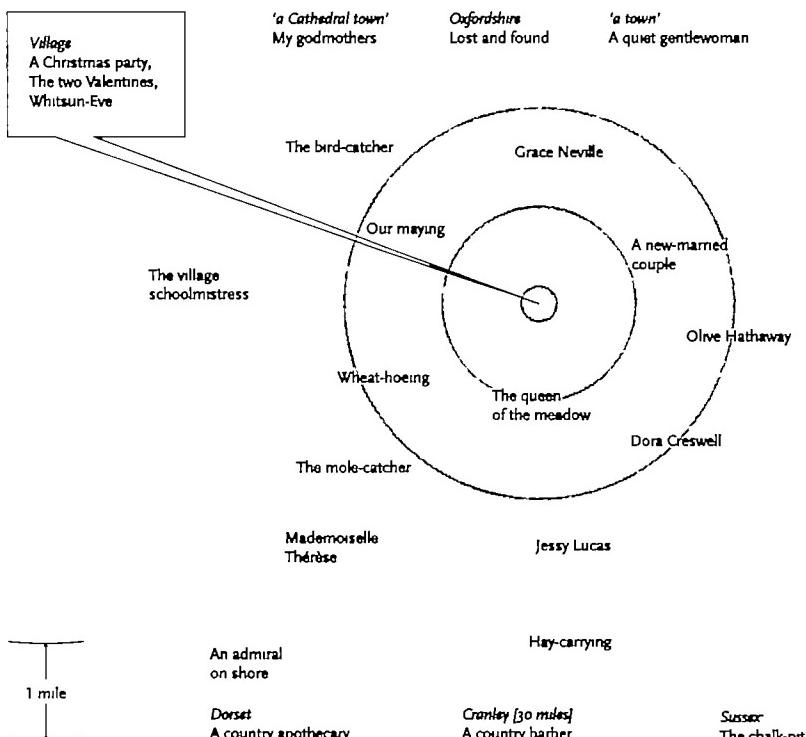
¹³ D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, *On Growth and Form* [1942], Mineola, NY 1992, p. 16.

¹⁴ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 'Toward a general comparative theory', 1790–94, in *Scientific studies*, Princeton 1995, p. 55.

idyllic world, and then turned back for the sheer pleasure of returning home, without ever being constrained by a contrary force (like, say, Jude Fawley at Christminster, where he's brutally forced back into Wessex). 'Anything that embodies itself with some freedom seeks a rounded shape', reads another of Goethe's aphorisms, and the rounded shape of figure 2 was indeed the embodiment of a literary form—a *mentalité*, an ideology—for which village life was still fundamentally independent of external forces.

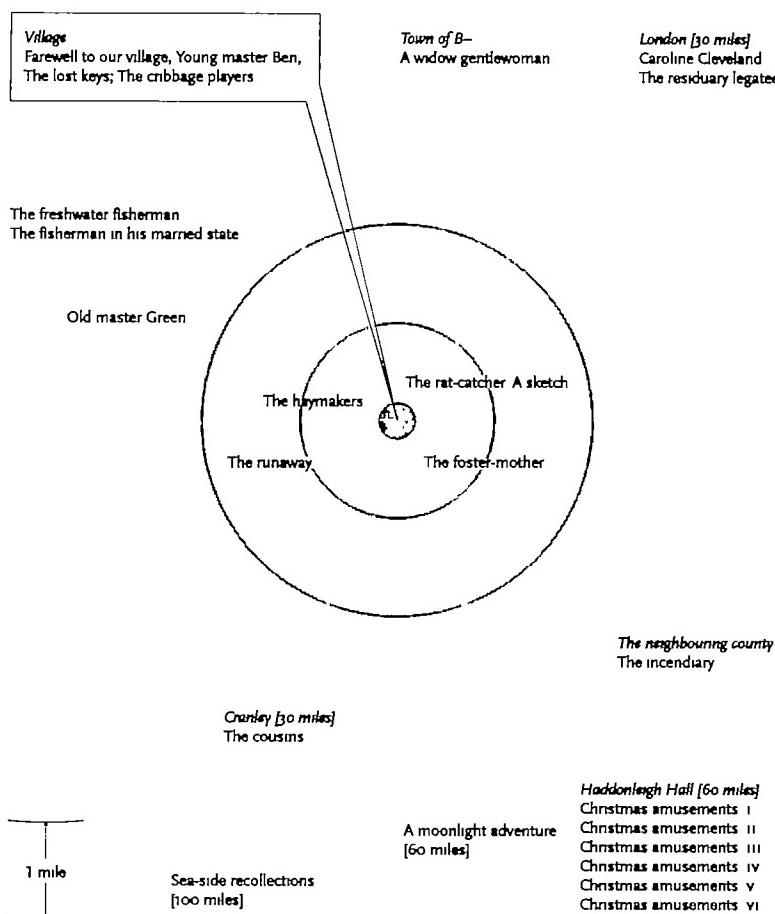
This, in 1824. Two collections later, in 1828 (figure 11), the gravitational field is already weaker: the walks are less frequent, and their pattern has become wider, less regular; fewer stories take place in the village itself, while several are set outside of Berkshire, in undefined distant towns (and often in the past as well). Something is wrong with the

FIGURE II: *Mary Mitford, Our Village, volume III [1828]*



force from within, but as no counter-force challenges it yet, the basic pattern, although somewhat unsteady, remains in place. But by 1832, it's all over (figure 12): the village's centripetal force is reduced to nothing, and the bulk of the book moves away, thirty miles, sixty, more, to play dumb parlour games in the mansions of the elite (and, again, ever more frequently in the past). Something has happened, here, and two stories suggest what: rick-burning. 'Oh the horror of those fires—breaking forth night after night, sudden, yet expected . . .' reads the first narrative of the volume, 'The incendiary'; 'We lived in the midst of the

FIGURE 12: Mary Mitford, *Our Village*, volume IV [1832]

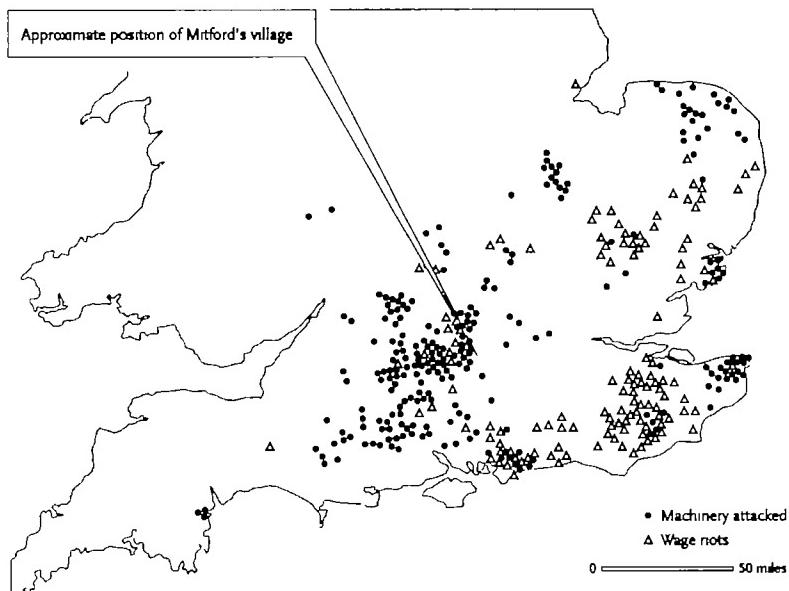


disturbed districts,' adds 'Young master Ben', and 'no one who lived within reach of the armed peasantry . . . could get rid of the vague idea of danger which might arrive at any moment . . .'. The armed peasantry of the 1830 uprisings (figure 13): this is the 'force from without' which has 'acted upon' *Our Village*, altering its narrative pattern beyond recognition. Figure 14, which charts the three volumes one next to the other, summarizes the disintegration of Mitford's chronotope.

IX

Let me conclude by briefly returning to the beginning. Thomas Moule's 1837 map of Berkshire, reproduced in figure 1, gave a good idea of the type of geography congenial to modern idyllic form: parks, rivers, country seats, low urbanization (and no railway in the early twenties,

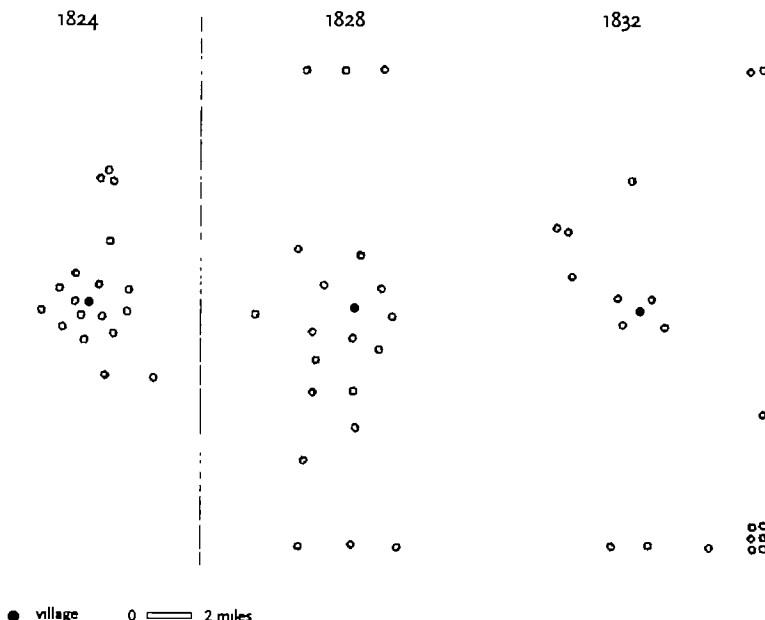
FIGURE 13: *Luddism, 1811–12, and Captain Swing disturbances, 1830*



Source: John Langton and R. J. Morris, eds, *Atlas of Industrializing Britain*

when Mitford starts writing). Figure 15 (overleaf) is another of Moule's maps, Cheshire this time, and Knutsford, near the centre of the figure, is Gaskell's 'Cranford', the setting of her 1853 rewriting of *Our Village*. In this case, Moule's map precedes the novel by fifteen years, but it already casts a shadow over Gaskell's projected idyll: urbanization is higher, Manchester is just 15 miles away, and by an uncanny coincidence Mitford's typical walk would end more or less at the Grand Junction Railway, where one of the book's most sympathetic characters, distracted by the latest number of *Pickwick*—the regular novelty which has just arrived from London—is killed by a train. Social geography does not agree with the form of the idyll here, and in order to keep the genre alive

FIGURE 14: *Mary Mitford, location of stories in volumes I, III, V*



In a very large part of morphology, our essential task lies in the comparison of related forms rather than in the precise definition of each; and the deformation of a complicated figure may be a phenomenon easy of comprehension, though the figure itself have to be left unanalysed and undefined . . . The essential condition is, that the form of the entire structure under investigation should be found to vary in a more or less uniform manner.

D'Arcy Thompson,
On Growth and Form

FIGURE 15: *Cranford*



Source Moule, *The English Counties Delineated*

Gaskell must literally hibernate her village: Cranford is presented as a place under siege, hardly alive, where no one dares to go anywhere, and everything is painstakingly saved (candles, carpets, clothes, stories . . .) to make it last as long as possible; and even so, only the half-magic arrival of Indian wealth can prolong its artificial existence. For every genre comes a moment when its inner form can no longer represent the most significant aspects of contemporary reality, I wrote in the first article of this series (*NLR* 24): at which point, either the genre betrays its form in the name of reality, thereby disintegrating, or it betrays reality in the name of form, becoming, in Shklovsky's words, a 'dull epigone'. Mitford in 1832, and Gaskell twenty years later, are the two ends of the

spectrum: *Our Village* explodes, and *Cranford* is Madame Tussaud's idea of a village story.

Make no mistake: Moule, Barrell, Langton and Morris have made maps of real English spaces, reproducing actual features of their material environment; I have made maps/diagrams of fictional worlds, where the real and the imaginary coexist in varying, often elusive proportions. The figures are different. But when they are collated and juxtaposed, they allow us a glimpse of what D'Arcy Thompson had in mind in his great final chapter on 'The theory of transformations':

We rise from a conception of form to an understanding of the forces which gave rise to it . . . and in the comparison of kindred forms . . . we discern the magnitude and the direction of the forces which have sufficed to convert the one form into the other.¹⁵

In the comparison of the kindred forms of *Our Village* in 1824, 1828, and 1832, and of the initial and final decades of *Annals of the Parish*, and of the British and German village stories, we discern indeed the various directions in which rural class struggle, the industrial take-off, and the process of state formation have 'converted' the shape of nineteenth-century idylls. As in an experiment, the force 'from without' of large national processes alters the initial narrative structure beyond recognition, and reveals the direct, almost tangible relationship between social conflict and literary form. Reveals form as a diagram of forces; or perhaps, even, as *nothing but force*.

¹⁵ D'Arcy Thompson, *On Growth and Form*, p. 1027.

REVIEW

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EDGARDO COZARINSKY

LETTER FROM BUENOS AIRES

Monday 9th June

I LEFT THE LONG summer days of Paris for the Buenos Aires winter: it was zero degrees and the afternoons were over by five thirty. The Kirchner government had been installed in May, and even among the capital's disillusioned, not to say cynical inhabitants, it was enjoying the obligatory honeymoon period. In the taxi from the airport, the driver asked me my opinion of the president's first measures: a green light for the trial of corrupt Supreme Court judges, the sacking of dozens of high-ranking military officers, government subsidies for public works under the auspices of select workers' organizations. I tried to explain to him that, having witnessed an array of more or less inefficient civilian governments and brutal military regimes, it was hard for me to have any illusions on this score, even if the outlook seemed quite positive. 'We are just like you,' he said, 'waiting for the first foul-up.'

Four Argentine films were showing in Paris when I left, including Diego Lerman's remarkable *Tan de repente* (*Suddenly*, 2002). My first surprise on arriving in Buenos Aires was to learn that this film—its opening section based on César Aira's short story, 'La prueba'—had not yet been released in its native country; it was to premiere two weeks later. As a juror at the 2002 Buenos Aires Independent Film Festival, I had been astonished by its grainy black-and-white images, its totally unconventional casting, and above all by its seemingly aimless, improvised narrative, the second half of which overturns everything established by the first.

All of these qualities, whilst unusual, are not entirely novel in the 'new' or 'young' Argentine cinema. (Though such promotional labels are worth little, it seems all but impossible to remove them.) Seven years ago, I discovered Martín Rejtman's first film *Rapado* (*Shaven*, 1992), a bolt of lightning in the desolate landscape of the time. Like Rejtman's next film, *Silvia Prieto* (1999), *Rapado* was striking for a ruthlessly pared-down aesthetic, and for its reserved but at times fanciful humour—all of which ran quite counter to the sentimentality and *telenovela* theatrics that then dominated most 'ambitious' Argentine films.

Rejtman has just turned forty, Lerman twenty-seven. Only thirteen years apart in age, they are separated by widely divergent life experience: the former spent his adolescence under the military regime, the latter amid the contradictions of the return to democratic rule. But the world-views of the two men—as manifested in their fictions and in the behaviour of their characters—are both equally alien to the *bien-pensant*, unnuanced presentation of testimony that Europe has too often expected to be the sole product of societies in conflict elsewhere in the world; as though Europeans had a monopoly on exploring the imaginary.

Tuesday 10th

The current crop of young directors approach the cinema with a strength and desire unknown to most of their elders. I can sense this in their work—films neither the industry nor the public demanded, and which exist only because of the determination of their makers. Once they are made, however, their necessity becomes fully apparent. This is most likely not the result of some new development, since the history of the cinema, no less than History itself, consists of what Vico referred to as '*corsi e ricorsi*'. And yet how to describe, if not with the word 'new', certain images and forms of behaviour that evoke a whole country and its people as if they were being filmed for the first time?

When I saw Lucrecia Martel's *La cinéaga* (*The Swamp*, 2001) in Paris, I was struck, not by the dysfunction of the provincial bourgeois family, but by the skill with which this first-time director choreographed the movements of the various characters within her frame; and by the film's setting—a country house or holiday home, where the beds are never made, where children come and go from the swimming pool without wiping their feet. Then there is the delicate evocation of the pains of

adolescent love, experienced above all in what is left unsaid, a transgression to which we cannot yet put a name. Filming 1,200 miles north of Buenos Aires in Salta province, Martel did not choose the picturesque scenery to the west—mountains, crystalline rocks eroded to fantastical forms—but opted instead for the low jungle and muggy atmosphere of the east. (Hence the frequent talk in the dialogue, so exotic to *porteño* ears, of going shopping in Bolivia, ‘where it’s better value for money’).

On screen I had always regarded the great variety of the Argentine landscape—stretching for nearly three thousand miles between the Tropic of Capricorn and the ice-floes of Antarctica—as little more than a backdrop intended to stir patriotic sentiment. In Martel’s film, the wind rarely ruffles the exteriors which, because of the sheer immobility of the camera and the deliberate lack of conviction in the acting, begin to seem as if they were made of cardboard. Perhaps one has to go back to Mario Soffici’s *Prisioneros de la tierra* (1939) to find nature so bare, and yet playing such an effective role. That ‘classic’ was an ambitious literary adaptation, but a long way from the chamber films to which the logic of production always consigned urban interiors.

Carlos Sorin is not a beginner. He is over fifty, and worked for a long time in advertising and as a cinematographer. Returning to directing after more than a decade of absence, he too left the metropolis—this time for the scenery of his beloved Patagonian desert. His *Historias mínimas* (*Minimal Stories*, 2002) was a word-of-mouth success in Argentina, with screenings multiplying week by week. The film combines anecdotal minimalism with extremely careful attention to the image and the actors—with a single exception, all non-professional. Its appeal, impossible to quantify or replicate, lies not only in its unending, empty scenery, but in its details: the tv game-show airing on a cable channel in the middle of nowhere, complete with shabby décor and rinky-dink presenter; the old man searching for his dog, sheepishly wondering if the animal could somehow know that his master had done something wrong; the boastful, love-struck travelling salesman who incessantly changes the name of the cake he is bringing to his girlfriend’s child.

Wednesday 11th

I visit the Rojas Cultural Centre, the most visible branch of the University of Buenos Aires’s ‘cultural wing’. A controversial forum for alternative

art in the eighties, *el Rojas* still hosts initiatives previously unthinkable in the local academic sector—such as a Queer Cinema festival, the first of which took place in 1996 and the most recent in 2002. Works on video that the general public might prefer not to know about have found an enthusiastic audience here: *Lesbianas de Buenos Aires*, a documentary by Santiago García; *HIV* by Goyo Anchou; *Clarilandia* by Violeta Uman; *Historia de amor en un baño público* (*Love Story in a Public Toilet*) by Pablo Oliverio. The 2002 programme included a Fassbinder retrospective which served to place these promising, civic-minded film essays in the context not just of cinema, but of culture in its broadest sense.

The head of the cinema department at Rojas is the former critic, Sergio Wolf. His *Yo no sé qué me han hecho tus ojos* (*I Don't Know What Your Eyes Have Done to Me*, 2003)—co-directed with Lorena Muñoz—won a prize at the Buenos Aires Independent Film Festival. This kind of ‘creative documentary’ is unusual in Argentina, where documentaries are generally based on straightforward reportage rather than on the intricacies of language. Wolf went in search of Ada Falcón, a tango singer with a tempestuous and extravagant lifestyle whose popularity was at its peak in the thirties. In 1942 she left her career, her house and her lovers, and took refuge—forever, it was said—in a convent deep in the sierras of Córdoba province, some 500 miles north-west of Buenos Aires. The film is like a ceremony conjuring the dead, with the editing suite taking the place of the spiritualist’s table. Through his research, Wolf brings out the vanished world of cabarets and radio halls behind the façades of today’s supermarkets and parking lots; he tests one unreliable witness against another and finally, like a cinephile Philip Marlowe, sets off for a remote village in Córdoba whose (real) name is Salsipuedes: Leaveifyoucan. Sure enough, there he finds a woman in her nineties being cared for by nuns. She puts make-up on to receive her guest, but refuses to recognize herself when he shows a video of one of her films, mocking her own languorous tones of long ago: ‘How badly she sings’.

It has been said that the emotional potency of popular music outweighs that of high-cultural forms. Christian Pauls’s portrait of the accordian player Leopoldo Federico, *Por la vuelta* (*To your Return*, 2002), filmed over four years, is another ‘creative documentary’ whose asceticism contrasts sharply with Wolf and Muñoz’s scintillating narrative. An ageing and rather unappealing figure, Federico simultaneously opens up to and hides away from Pauls, whose project he has not quite grasped. But in

the process, he nevertheless plays for the camera, and Pauls is able to encompass, without penetrating it, the mystery of tango—music which, according to Borges, suggests to us an imaginary and yet real past. While the musician cleans and tests his instrument, Pauls reads aloud Federico's memorable correspondence with the great composer and *tanguista* Astor Piazzolla. The tone of the letters moves from warmth to rancour and then, via professional respect, back to friendship once more.

These films were produced by Cine Ojo, a company owned by the directors Marcelo Céspedes and Carmen Guarini. Their stance is one of unwavering resistance, but their films, while dealing with awkward topics, have never been demagogic. Their latest vindicates this choice on both the political and cinematographic levels. Its title, *H.I.J.O.S.* comes from the initials of a group formed by descendants of the 'disappeared'—its acronym the Spanish word for children. The film is a discreet chronicle of the apprenticeships of a handful of young people who want to contribute to society, but who are at the same time highly distrustful of existing structures, above all any notion of authority. The editing of their meetings takes into account the tentative nature of their remarks and the difficulties involved in reaching an agreement when all 'verticality'—a word with a sinister past in Argentine politics and union organizing—has been rejected in favour of the strictest 'horizontality'. Three characters gradually emerge, three experiences of the 'disappearance' of parents due to state terrorism; the film consists as much in these stories of the past as of daily lives in the present. The *H.I.J.O.S.* collective comes together during *escraches*, a slang word for public protests outside the homes of those responsible—and still unpunished—for the horrors of the Dirty War. Filming in 2001, before President De la Rúa's December flight from the Casa Rosada at the height of the economic crisis, the makers of *H.I.J.O.S.* courageously included footage of the *escrache* denouncing Basilio Pertiné, head of the naval air corps and brother of Mme De la Rúa.

Further connections between personal stories and History are explored in another Cine Ojo co-production: *La televisión y yo* (*Television and Me*, 2002) by Andrés di Tella. The director studies the history, as much private as public, of the industrial empire built by his immigrant grandfather, and its present ruin—a story that runs parallel to that of Argentine radio and television, both entangled with the Perón regime in an impenetrable set of conflicts and complicities. Di Tella puts himself in the

frame, face to face with his father and his own son. His thoughts take the form of a series of digressions—often very funny—that reflect without nostalgia on the film's central theme: the bankruptcy of social projects and the unpredictable connexions between generations, which succeed each other in the same place but in different worlds.

Thursday 12th

What made the emergence of these young (and not so young) filmmakers possible? One important factor might be the incredible proliferation of film schools in Argentina over the last decade or so. Some of these are well equipped; others make do with the barest means. Often run by dedicated directors, they can be crowded and massively oversubscribed, like Manuel Antín's 'cinema university', or take the form of a select group, such as that working with José Martínez Suárez. Some years ago, before the current flowering of Argentine cinema, I often heard people say that, given the lack of professional opportunities, such institutions were only 'schools of frustration'. I now realise that with the sheer strength of their desire, these young people have turned the tables. Rather than waiting to take their assigned places in a pre-existing market, they simply dived in and made their films—and in the process were often taken up by producers with an eye for talent. This is the case for Lita Stantic, herself a director, who produced *La ciénaga* and made possible such outsider projects as *Tan de repente* or Pablo Trapero's *Mundo grúa* (*Crane World*, 1999). Today even the most obtuse civil servant will speak of cinema as a cultural good with an export value that should be taken into account.

And yet one often hears the bitterness of a displaced generation: 'How many out of this avalanche of parvenus will stay the course?' (As though a selection process were not in the very nature of things, or had not applied to every breakaway movement in the arts.) In April 2001, at the Buenos Aires Independent Film Festival, I was about to see *La libertad* (*Freedom*, 2001) by Lisandro Alonso when I bumped into an old acquaintance. 'You're going to see that?' he said. 'You know what it's about? A woodcutter who chops wood and shits outdoors for an hour and five minutes.' Alonso's film did provoke extreme reactions in Argentina, especially after its selection in the *Un certain regard* category at Cannes. Twenty-five at the time the film was made, Alonso was pilloried as the cause of a potential slump in public interest in Argentine film. But Alonso, who

possesses an inextricable combination of candour and audacity, never had any intention of excluding other types of cinema; his sole aim is to work in his own space, which he is determined to defend.

Between the 1960s 'Third Cinema' of Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino and the present, there is an entire intermediary generation which, though it continues to make films that are occasionally successful, has largely been discarded by critics in search of novelty, if not by the public. Young cinephiles seem to have taken from the recent past only the uneven work of Leonardo Favio, whose films are interspersed with devastating flashes of lyricism; or else that of Jorge Polaco, whose work was considered extreme thirteen years ago, but is today seen as the living link to a 'young' or 'independent' cinema. Beyond these two, I can only see the influence of Alberto Fischerman, an isolated figure with a hesitant approach, most notable for making *The Players vs. Ángeles Caídos* (1969), a film that is both without equal and highly representative of the spirit of 1968. Fischerman, who died in 1995 at the age of fifty-eight, had a taste for risk, a certain indifference to convention, even when making straightforward comedies; qualities which make him the rarest bird ever to have visited Argentine cinema.

Marcelo Piñeyro forms a separate case, since his well-funded films have gradually revealed a strong directorial persona. Starting with his third film, *Cenizas del paraíso* (*Ashes of Paradise*, 1997), and then with *Plata quemada* (*Money to Burn*, 1999)—freely inspired by Ricardo Piglia's novel of the same name—and now *Kamchatka* (2003), Piñeyro has emerged as the only filmmaker to have successfully married the demands of the industry with that something else that makes them live on, in the desires and memories of the public.

Friday 13th

I didn't see any films today, even though friends had pointed out to me the screening of two well-regarded first works: *Nadar solo* (*Swimming Alone*, 2003) by Ezequiel Acuña and *Ana y los otros* (*Ana and the Others*, 2002) by Celina Murga. I wandered through areas I didn't know when I lived in Buenos Aires, and which I only became curious about after long years of absence, thinking that I might never be able to return. Marcelo, a 26-year-old taxi-driver, insisted that 'there is nothing to see'; for me there was everything to see.

Eighteen months on from the collapse of 2001—in which Argentina defaulted on its \$155bn public debt—there are hints of an economic recovery everywhere: ‘to rent’ or ‘for sale’ signs have given way to cafés, internet salons, laundrettes or other businesses that take twenty-four hours to set up, and can disappear in twelve. Misery itself has been institutionalized: many *cartoneros*—collectors of recyclable rubbish—are paid by middlemen who each night take their haul off to the paper mills. Shanty towns have now sprung up even inside the ring-road and by late afternoon, whole ex-suburban families can be seen hurrying to sort through the dustbins in upmarket areas or shopping districts. Elsewhere the *piqueteros*, road-block activists for workers’ rights, are more or less tolerated by the authorities; many of them receive a rather paternalistic and selective form of unemployment benefit for large families, set up by the 2002–03 Duhalde government in a bid to stave off social violence.

What remains of the middle class is the most active element in this defeated society, which expects the new government to take concrete economic or social measures, not just gestures proving its moral integrity—however necessary these may be. For many, culture has become the only refuge, a source of vital energy (I think of Berlin in 1919, of Vienna in 1921). Just like in the good old days, several bookshops on Corrientes stay open until midnight and—if utterly disorganized and of uneven quality—there are more plays, concerts and films to see than in many European capitals.

At the Buenos Aires Independent Film Festival in April 2003, Bernard Bénoliel of the Cinémathèque Française was utterly astounded by the four-hundred-strong audience that flocked to a screening of Jean Epstein’s *Tempestaire* (1947). Claire Denis was given a triumphant welcome by admirers familiar with her complete filmography. The American critic Jonathan Rosenbaum presented a programme entitled ‘Lost Cinema’, showing rare films—without announcing their titles beforehand—to an eager, curious public. (I am told that the programme included a VHS of my first underground film, *Puntos suspensivos* of 1971, of which I have no copies.) Now a regular at the Festival, Rosenbaum considers it the most exciting in the world, due to its range and bold programming, and the interaction it affords with an ever-enthusiastic public. I remember meeting, in June 2001, a young couple who had come by bus all the way from Tucumán—an eighteen-hour

journey—solely in order to catch *Dukhovnye golosa* (*Spiritual Voices*, 1995), Sokurov's five-and-a-half-hour film on the Afghan war. Founded by Andrés di Tella, the festival was revived by Eduardo Antín, editor-in-chief of *El amante*, the oldest surviving Argentine cinema journal. In the midst of the crisis of 2001–2, Antín managed to secure international funding which enabled the festival—it always fills at least ten of the city's cinemas—to go ahead. (Other journals have opted to publish on the internet after years of paper editions: *Film* has for some time now been *Film on line*; the lively and younger *Otrocampo* was born on the web.)

At the Independent Film Festival I also came across the films of Gustavo Postiglione, a director from the River Plate commercial port of Rosario, Argentina's second industrial city. *El asadito* (*The Barbecue*, 2000), filmed in a single night on the roof of a building, and *El cumple* (*The Birthday*, 2002), made in a weekend, are both set in his home town. The 'barbecue' in the former and the birthday party in the latter provide snapshots of life, *ensemble* pieces full of mumbled conversations and rich in incidental detail. They are similar in tone to some of Altman's films, though less focused. The most daring film at the festival—perhaps my favourite because of its unapologetic marginality—was Ernesto Baca's *Cabeza de palo* (*Stick Head*, 2002). Running for an hour and five minutes without dialogue, the film is a mosaic built around the unexpected but always compelling behaviour of an assortment of odd characters, and framed in sequences of eloquent simplicity.

Saturday 14th

I am told that Pablo Trapero, the 31-year-old director of *Mundo grúa* and *El bonaerense* (2002)—possibly the two most powerful films of this new Argentine cinema—has decided to produce seven films between June 2003 and December 2004 with his company Matanza Cine, some in co-production with Chile, Brazil and even Bolivia. Trapero's films are harshly critical of the social relations he explores, but are also marked by a great tenderness towards his characters: the construction worker in *Mundo grúa* who, made redundant for being overweight, sets off on a journey to the distant south in search of work; or the local locksmith in *El bonaerense* who joins the notoriously corrupt Buenos Aires police force after serving a sentence for petty crime, and there encounters new levels of brutality and criminal impunity.

Trapero works with non-professional actors—*el Rulo*, the endearing central character of *Mundo grúa*, is played by a former rock musician—and members of his own family. His grandmother appears in all his films, and will be the protagonist in his forthcoming *Familia rodante* (*Touring Family*). He draws from them performances true to life in ways I have not encountered since Rossellini's work from 1945–7. Trapero goes beyond naturalism by recognizing the humour in his characters and their situations; his films possess, too, a latent lyricism which subtends the lonely moments when his male characters allow their fragility to show through. No other Argentine director has been able to portray men's vulnerability in violent situations in this way.

This very mature young director's move into production is highly significant. After the local and international success of his first two features, Trapero is assured of financing for his own projects. He has refused to work in the privileged conditions of television, choosing instead to produce films such as those by Raúl Perrone, a fifty-year-old filmmaker known affectionately as 'the underground's underground'. For over ten years now, Perrone has been making video-films chronicling the lives of young people in Ituzaingó, Buenos Aires province—a colourless locale that has become his microcosm, a land of his own like the worlds novelists populate with their creations.

Trapero has also offered to produce the next project by Albertina Carri, a twenty-nine-year-old director whose second feature, *Los rubios* (*The Blondes*, 2003), is an investigation into the 1977 'disappearance' of her own parents. Despite the use of a well-worn *mise en abyme*—in which an actress declares to the camera that she is playing the role of the director, who herself then appears in the frame, directing the actress playing her—the film avoids the solemnity and ideological simplifications common to many cinematic treatments of the *desaparecidos*. The real subjects of Carri's films are the impossibility of compensating for such a lack, the brutal severing of family ties, memory's search for facts—and unstoppable fictionalization of what it finds. There is a very funny scene in which the film crew reads a letter from the National Institute of Cinema refusing financial backing on the grounds that, since the director's parents were intellectuals, she should be interviewing important figures rather than mere neighbours. The Institute later reversed its decision, but the letter, signed not only by state

bureaucrats but by a film director and writer, remains a monument to right-thinking censorship.

There have been further-flung instances of such *bien-pensant* interference. In France, for example, a television channel demanded that 29-year-old Daniel Rosenfeld's *Aborigen Rugby Club* (2002)—co-produced by France 2—be fitted with a commentary that would clear the film of any possible charge of indulgence towards its chief protagonist. As in his last film, a portrait of the musician Dino Saluzzi, Rosenfeld works without commentary. No voice-over allocates blame or directs the viewer's gaze. Instead, Rosenfeld juxtaposes actions and words, and the confrontations between them become pregnant with meaning. The central character of *Aborigen Rugby Club* is Eduardo Rossi, the white trainer of an indigenous Toba rugby team from Formosa province in the north-east of Argentina. Murky and fascinating in equal measure, Rossi reveals himself unreservedly to the director's gaze: his fascist sympathies, his puerile militarism. At the same time, he uses sport to tear a group of young men away from alcohol and idleness, and inspire in them a pride in their ethnicity and the reclamation of their land from an indifferent, faraway capital. Rossi's contradictions are the real subject of the film's zigzagging narrative, which culminates in a journey to Buenos Aires, where the Indian players take it upon themselves to beat the 'sons of Europeans' that another 'son of Europeans' taught them to hate.

Sunday 15th

Before leaving for Paris—returning to the bright summer skies only to shut myself up in an editing room—I visited the bars in Palermo Viejo. Fifteen years ago it was a run-down, abandoned district. Today it is full of designer boutiques, Thai or Scandinavian restaurants, architects' and psychoanalysts' offices. Veronica Chen, a young Chinese-Argentine director, is my guide to this preserve of Buenos Aires's *bobos*—bourgeois bohemians. I felt that her first film, *Vagón fumador* (*Smoking Compartment*, 2001), had been unfairly ignored by the critics. Though far from perfect, and full of impenetrable dialogues, the film nonetheless has a certain visceral urgency. It recounts a young bourgeois girl's passion for a *taxis boy*, a homosexual gigolo working the streets, whom she follows until she manages to join his circle and, eventually, share his bed as part of a threesome. The two most powerful scenes in the film were the late-night sequence of the boy doing his job in the

cashpoint lobby of a bank, captured on cctv; and that showing a gang of *taxis boys* roller-skating in the rain, circling a statue of General San Martín, whom schoolbooks term 'the father of the fatherland'.

When Chen was born, I was leaving Argentina for the first time on a scholarship. A general was in power, who ensured that boys with long hair were followed through the streets; his wife, meanwhile, was agitating for the prohibition of a contemporary opera which she'd heard contained obscenities. Are they both still alive? For a long time I detested them. Later there would be other uniformed officials in power, murderers this time, and if I happen now to think of that slightly ridiculous, unhappy couple, I do so without enmity, but with a certain curiosity. Even while they were alive they became fossils, no longer threatening. I tell all of this to Chen, who laughs: she has no personal recollection of the couple in question.

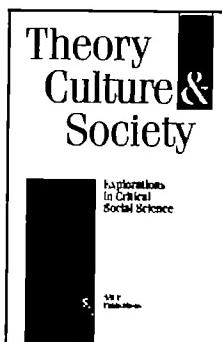
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REVIEWS

Bernard Stasi, *Laïcité et République. Rapport de la commission de réflexion sur l'application du principe de laïcité dans la République*. La Documentation française: Paris 2004, €8.50, paperback
166 pp, 2 11 005550 2

EMMANUEL TERRAY

HEADSCARF HYSTERIA

In a series of mid-twentieth century essays the Hungarian historian, István Bibó, attempted to explain the blindness and irresponsibility that had characterized the interwar politics of the Central European states—Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary—and led them to catastrophe. In doing so he proposed a new concept, that of political hysteria. Bibó's central hypothesis was that when a community fails to find within itself the means or energy to deal with a problem that challenges, if not its existence, then at least its way of being and self-image, it may be tempted to adopt a peculiar defensive ploy. It will substitute a fictional problem, which can be mediated purely through words and symbols, for the real one that it finds insurmountable. In grappling with the former, the community can convince itself that it has successfully confronted the latter. It experiences a sense of relief and thus feels itself able to carry on as before. Anthropologists have explained the magical practices of 'primitive' societies along similar lines. Communities which feel themselves defenceless before a nature that they cannot control will people it with invisible powers—gods, djinns, spirits—that are its masters. At a stroke, these communities provide themselves with a means not just to understand the forces of nature but to affect them, by propitiating their gods with sacrifices and incantations.

Bibó borrowed the notion of hysteria from psychiatry, and above all from Freud, although he does not explicitly cite him. For Freud, the chief symptom of hysterical anxiety is phobia. His description of it in the *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* is well known:

What he [the patient] is afraid of is evidently his own libido. The difference between this situation and that of realistic anxiety lies in two points: that the danger is an internal instead of an external one and that it is not consciously recognized. In phobias it is very easy to observe the way in which this internal danger is transformed into an external one—that is to say, how a neurotic anxiety is changed into an apparently realistic one . . . Let us suppose that the agoraphobic patient is invariably afraid of feelings of temptation that are aroused in him by meeting people in the street. In his phobia he brings about a displacement and henceforward is afraid of an external situation. What he gains by this is obviously that he thinks he will be able to protect himself better in that way. One can save oneself from an external danger by flight; fleeing from an internal danger is a difficult enterprise.

Bibó is fully aware of the methodological questions that arise from deploying a notion taken from individual psychology to account for collective behaviour. If political hysteria may offer a rostrum for particular hysterics, it has its own causes and does not spring from a mere aggregation of personal hysterias. It embraces numerous individuals who, in personal terms, are perfectly balanced and healthy—even if they are actively propagating political hysteria. Bibó's formulation of the relation between collective and individual experience avoids both simple identification and absolute dissociation:

The internal processes of a community may display astonishing analogies with individual psychological processes. The man who recoils in fright before the task ahead, yet blusters and grows aggressive to hide his fear, is the model for certain types of collective behaviour. But that does not mean that the community possesses a consciousness [as a man does] or that the two modes of behaviour, individual and collective, obey the same rules. The collective process both combines and structures individual reactions, thus implying a greater number of possible combinations but also a more important role for intentionality, shared objectives and conventions.

With these precautions in mind, it is tempting to consider whether the debate over the Muslim headscarf that has convulsed the French Republic over the past year, leading to the new law of February 2004, can be understood as an episode of political hysteria. The heated nature of the discussion and the quasi-unanimity—transcending the usual political divisions—of those urging that the headscarf be banned from state schools indicate that the diagnosis could be appropriate. Here, I will attempt to sketch in broad outline what such a pathological interpretation might reveal.

In this instance the root cause of the hysteria, the initial problem, would appear to be twofold. Firstly, there is the 'breakdown of integration' as it affects France's 5 million-plus Muslim community: segregated cities, irreducible pockets of misery and unemployment, ghetto schools, educational failure, discrimination in the job and housing markets, workplace racism—and, finally, the retinue of bitterness and violence that these phenomena provoke in their victims, especially the young. Secondly: the slowdown or stagnation of any equalization of the sexes. Since its victories of the 1970s on contraception and abortion, the women's movement has made scant progress. The gap between male and female salaries persists, women are largely excluded from the highest ranks of the political, administrative and economic hierarchies, domestic violence continues unabated, the porn industry is more profitable than ever. In other words: stalemate here, too. Finally, one point where these two—distinct—problems converge is in what the French call the 'sensitive' cities or districts, where the status of women is low and the constraints of male domination weigh most heavily.

Attempts to solve these problems—legislative drafts, plans, projects: the entire parliamentary and administrative arsenal—have so far proved utterly ineffective. In each case, a massive build-up of habit, prejudice and vested interest needs to be confronted head on; both mentalities and behaviour have to change. A huge social restructuring programme would be needed to get rid of the ghetto-like estates. In the same way, a thorough-going equality of the sexes would challenge innumerable routines and personal advantages, sanctified by custom. In both cases, these are tasks that must be carried out not just by the social order as a whole but by each of us, in our own lives. No power, however well intentioned, could perform them in our place.

Educated by the political culture of the last two centuries, the French tend to rely on the role of the state and law in the conduct of public affairs and are ill-equipped to deal with problems that call for other modes of collective action: education, persuasion, example. Besides, precisely because they would challenge established customs, egotism and privilege, any such transformations are bound to be unpopular. Who in the political, intellectual or media establishment would take the risk of proposing or defending such root-and-branch solutions, in a 'democracy of opinion' such as France?

Nevertheless, the undeniable extent and persistence of these problems—racial exclusion, sexual inequality—come as a brutal affront to national *amour-propre*. The French like to consider their Republic the home of the Rights of Man, blessed with liberty, fraternity and equality; an example to the rest of the world. All the more painful to accept the reality that belies this complacent portrait. In France as elsewhere, exclusion is growing, inequalities are deepening, racism is as virulent as ever. The Republic is scarcely qualified to give lessons to its neighbours.

Powerless before problems that it has not the energy to master, its narcissism wounded, its self-image under assault: confronted with such difficulties, the hysterical community will substitute a fictive problem that can be solved purely in terms of discourse and symbols. By this means, it gives itself the illusion of having triumphed over the attack. During the past year in France the headscarf issue has fulfilled the role of fictive problem very neatly. To be credible, the hysterical substitution must satisfy certain conditions. Firstly, it must bear some manifest relation to the actual problems it is called upon to replace, so that in speaking of it one can have the sense that one is grappling with them—although without ever needing to do so explicitly. The headscarf is worn by Muslim girls, nearly all of whom come from immigrant families; at a stroke, it invokes—genie-like—the problems of cultural exclusion and gender inequality.

Initially, it is true, the headscarf seemed ill-suited to play the role of substitute national problem, due to the scant numbers of girls actually wanting to cover their heads in school. According to official statistics—Education Ministry and Renseignements Généraux—there were barely 1,200 incidents of girls wearing headscarves at school in 2003, out of which less than thirty led to court cases, resulting in only four actual exclusions under the Conseil d'Etat ruling of 1989 (which debarred 'ostentatious' religious signs or dress that constituted 'proselytism or propaganda'). The statistics also suggest that these figures have barely changed since 1989. Such a slender base was clearly insufficient to sustain a 'great national debate'. It therefore had to be enlarged.

Ironically, Chirac's establishment in July 2003 of a Presidential Commission to investigate the matter—a 20-strong body headed by Bernard Stasi, Mediator of the Republic—has in itself played a major role in this enlargement. One merit of the Stasi Commission's Report, now published as *Laïcité et République*, is its faithful reflection of both the rhetoric and the growing strength of French hysteria. A key first move was to cast doubt on the value of the official statistics—the classic tactic of breaking the thermometer when it fails to demonstrate the desired results. Instead of the state's figures, the Stasi Commission chose to rely on the accounts of 'actors in the field', all of whom reported a far tenser situation on the ground. While such evidence is no doubt qualitatively valuable, it is not clear that it is so useful in quantitative terms. Still, it allowed the Stasi Commission to conclude that the state administration had been overtaken by events, that the crisis had escaped not only its awareness but its control.

Various commentators have since estimated that the official statistics should be multiplied by four, at the very least. Since even then the total is scarcely impressive, a second argument has been brought into play: this sum itself represents only the tip of an iceberg whose underwater mass

we can only guess at. The four schoolgirls are only the outriders of a vast army, manipulated by ominous forces who are probing our defences before giving the order to attack. These shadowy elements are encountered on nearly every page of the Stasi Report: 'politico-religious activists', 'extremist politico-religious tendencies', an 'activist minority', 'organized groups testing the resistance of the Republic', 'communalist politico-religious groups', etc. The Report is careful to give no hint of the actual identity of these bodies—indeed, their anonymity makes them all the more powerful. Nevertheless, we are allowed to surmise that they form some part of that vast Islamic-fundamentalist nebula of which—as we all know—al-Qaeda is the core. Their goal is nothing less than the destabilization of our institutions and our democracy: 'the very future of our public services is at stake'. What is more: 'these dangers are menacing the entire structure of our judicial system'. In such circumstances, those who stubbornly insist on the official statistics—two dozen cases, four exclusions—only demonstrate their own inability to see what is staring them in the face.

'In politics, the emotion of fear often grows at the expense of all others. One is willing to be afraid of everything, when one no longer has a strong desire for anything at all', wrote Tocqueville in *The Old Regime and the Revolution*. How else indeed might such a blasé, disenchanted population as the French be stirred, if not by making it tremble every so often before imaginary threats? The process is all the more effective since, as Guizot observed in his *Memoirs*: 'Men are made in such a way that they find fantastical dangers the worst. They will fight against bodies. They lose their heads—either from fear or rage—before ghosts.'

An essential difference between individual and collective hysteria needs to be borne in mind here. In the individual case, the original problem is thoroughly repressed, buried in the unconscious, and the substitute alone occupies the front stage. Such an occlusion is impossible at the collective level, since no shared unconscious exists. The real effects of the original problem thus continue to draw attention, and there will always be a few observers spared by the pathology. Collective hysteria thus proceeds not so much by repression as by neutralization, via a technique that we might call 'doffing one's hat in passing'. The initial problem is invoked, but by a form of rhetorical artifice that immediately sets it in parentheses, so that the discussion can turn back to the substitute and carry on as before.

L'Algérie et République offers a textbook example of this process. Far from glossing over the problems of racial or ethnic exclusion in France, it provides a very pertinent description of them. It rightly notes that, within the current social context, the retreat into religious identity may often be inflicted rather than desired, and gives a powerful description of the process by which a stigma may be transformed into an emblem of pride, along 'Black is

'beautiful' lines. In its final summary, the Report delivers a categorical verdict: 'Secularism only has meaning and legitimacy if equality of opportunity is guaranteed in every corner of the land'. The innocent may be tempted to conclude that since, as the Report itself attests, equality of opportunity is far from being assured in France, secularism currently lacks both meaning and legitimacy. On the contrary.

Certain social situations render rights less credible, and thus hinder their victims from assuming their [social] duties. But one should not take advantage of this to declare the demands of secularism illegitimate, nor desist from affirming them on the pretext that social injustice exists.

So the hand is played: social injustice—whose eradication has just been presented as a necessary condition for secularism—has now metamorphosed into a mere pretext, to be scanted without further ado. We can thus rule it out, and carry on as before.

If the Stasi Commission is to be believed, the method can be applied in every instance, on the grounds that, 'In any case, high principles are not refuted by low practice'. As the reciprocal proposition is no less true—high principles do nothing to prevent low practice—one can, in the same breath, proclaim the principles and abandon the practices to their baseness. This would certainly explain the extreme poverty of the Report's concrete proposals on integration. The Commission 'hopes that the policy of fighting . . . discrimination will be a national priority'. Racial exclusion thus joins dangerous driving, help for the disabled, cancer research, care for the elderly, health insurance reform and a host of other national priorities—a list that can be extended all the more freely, since there are no resources to deal with any of it. The Commission further notes that:

The future independent high authority charged with responsibility for all forms of discrimination will have to modify practices and develop modes of behaviour with regard to direct and indirect racism and religious intolerance.

This is the Cartesian method, as described by Leibniz: take what is necessary, do what is convenient, and you will end up with what you are looking for. What resources will this high authority have at its disposal? Will it act by persuasion or coercion? Will it be endowed with disciplinary powers? What representation will it have at ground level, and what type of personnel will be at its disposal? The Stasi Commission saves its views on these questions for another occasion.

With the realities of discrimination and exclusion safely sent on their way, the discussion can retire to the ethereal realm of high principles, whose all-purpose mobilization is a well-known speciality of French political

rhetoric. *Laïcité et République* is no exception. Freedom of conscience, personal autonomy, the critical spirit, tolerance, equality of opportunity, the secularism of school and state: all the great values of the Republic are summoned, with the sole exception—not entirely innocent—of fraternity. Yet the exaltation of these lofty principles runs the risk that, sooner or later, one may be required to translate them into facts. Here it is important that the murky realities so recently shown the door should not be allowed to climb back in through the window. The Stasi Commission deploys a tactic that typifies the general argument of those calling for a new law against the headscarf. Firstly, a principle is invoked to which one attributes an absolute, universal value. Secondly, and in short order, its application is essentially limited to schoolgirls' headgear, to the exclusion of virtually all other objects and occasions.

Many opponents of the headscarf—or veil, as they now prefer to call it—have stressed its symbolism as a form of women's oppression, for which reason it is not to be tolerated in the Republic. 'Objectively', Bernard Stasi explained to the newspaper *Ouest France*, 'wearing the veil translates as female alienation'. 'Objectively': meaning, taken on its own, independent of the status, the feelings or beliefs of those who wear it. But if this is the case, surely it is not just teenage girls but all women who should be banned from wearing the veil, and not just in state schools but everywhere: universities, corporations, the market, on public transport and in the street. And surely the interdiction should be extended to other, non-Islamic veils—those of nuns, for example. Naturally, the headscarf's opponents do not envisage this sort of extension of their ban; but on the same grounds, one may question the universalism and absolute nature of their proclaimed principles—all the more, since so many other aspects of 'female alienation' escape these lofty condemnations. And if universalism is at stake, why restrict the ban merely to objects of apparel? The Stasi Commission rejoices that 'public administrations have more consideration than formerly for dietary restrictions based on religious convictions'. Yet surely the refusal to share a common meal is at least as 'ostentatious' a sign of religious affiliation as wearing a scarf?

As a further limit to universalist principles, the headscarf is only to be banned within the public education system. Under the Debré law of 1959—which aimed to settle the longstanding 'school wars' between public and private systems in France by declaring private education to be a 'public-service mission'—any fee-paying school can enter into a contract with the state whereby the latter will pay the teachers' salaries while the school, although subject to national inspection programmes, etc., is free to plan its activities in accordance with its own 'special character', officially recognized by the state. As Jack Lang recalled in a recent debate, the public-service

mission of these establishments obliged them 'to welcome all children without distinction of origins, viewpoint or belief . . . in full respect for freedom of conscience'; it is on these grounds that the schools are entitled to state finance. Why then are they absolved from the secularist principles that are supposed to govern the public service?

The Stasi Report goes so far as to suggest that the 'obligations of neutrality' imposed on public services 'should be mentioned in the contracts drawn up with enterprises delegated as public service'. Naturally, this does not include contracted private schools. For Jack Lang, as for the authors of *Laïcité et République*, the principles of secularism and neutrality do not apply to these establishments, thanks to their 'special character'.

Better yet, the Stasi Commission considers them a guarantee of religious liberty: 'The existence of faith-based schools, in contractual agreement with the state, allows for the full affirmation of religious freedom, taking their special character into account'. Elsewhere, the Report insists that 'no ruling prevents the creation of Muslim schools', while 'certain Muslim parents already prefer their children to have a Catholic schooling, so that their children can benefit from an education in religious values'. This seems to suggest that an acceptable answer to the headscarf question would be the expansion of state-contracted Islamic schools, where wearing the scarf would be not merely authorized but prescribed, in the name of the school's 'special character'. As to the effects of such a solution on the 'integration' of the girls concerned, the Commission seems not to have judged it opportune to interrogate itself too closely on that point.

In the same way, the Report is careful not to call into question the special status of Alsace-Moselle. In 1905, when the law separating church and state was passed by the French parliament, terminating Napoleon's Concordat with the Vatican of 1801, Alsace and Moselle were still incorporated into the German Empire. Returned to France in 1918, they were permitted to retain their concordat status. The salaries of Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist and Jewish clerics there have been paid by the French state, and religious education is integrated into the curriculum. Intrinsic elements of the Republic, these departments are tangible proof of its ability to practice its secularism as it pleases and to offer the broadest latitude when it is so inclined. The Stasi Commission sees nothing abnormal in this:

The Commission finds that the reaffirmation of secularism does not lead to any questioning of the special status of Alsace-Moselle, to which the population of these departments is particularly attached.

That local popular attachment should be sufficient argument to justify a derogation of the national law rings oddly in a text devoted to the denunciation

of communalist interests. Although the Report is not specific about this, it would seem that Alsace-Moselle need not be too worried about a law forbidding the manifestation of religious affiliation in their state schools.

This gulf between the appeal to universalist principles and their narrow application demands further explanation. Some speak of cynicism or hypocrisy. I would argue that such glaring inconsistencies are standard symptoms of political hysteria. The hysterical community feels a compulsive need to recite its principles and values, the repetition serving as reassurance and reaffirmation of its own self-image. This does not mean that it is prepared to act on them, if to do so would lead to a painful confrontation. Which French government will question the Alsace-Moselle statute or the Debré law, in the name of secularism? In the end, it is the principle of opportunism that wins the day. Logical rigour gives way to a—perfectly understandable—longing for tranquillity. What could be more natural? Still, if only to avoid troubling simple souls, it would be wiser for the great men of the Republic to be less categorical about their principles.

Finally, what of the scope and consequences of the new legislation itself? The basic provision states: 'Items of dress and signs that manifest religious or political affiliations'—the political interdiction, slipped in by the Stasi Commission, has attracted little comment—'are forbidden in state schools, colleges and lycées'; and further, 'the dress and signs forbidden are ostensible signs', not 'discreet' ones. In a strange spasm of remorse, the Report assures us in the very next paragraph that 'this is not a question of imposing a ban'. A fine example of Freudian denial: of course it is imposing a ban. We may summarize its effects.

First, the law is supposed to provide clear guidelines for teachers, headmasters and headmistresses, allowing them either to resolve cases or despatch them for litigation as speedily as possible. On this point, the disputes that have already arisen around the interpretation of the term *ostensible*, and the exact boundaries between the (forbidden) ostensible and the (authorized) discreet, are hardly reassuring. In enumerating the 'difficulties' of the situation that prevailed after 1989, the Stasi Commission notes that 'the adoption of case-by-case decision-making assumed the possibility of headmasters or headmistresses taking on responsibilities'. It is not clear why this assumption of responsibility should be considered a difficulty—some might consider it the definition of their job. In any case, they will not be relieved of it by the new legislation, since 'dialogue' and 'mediation' under their auspices will still precede any legal sanction.

The law will not be entirely ineffective. In all probability, a higher number of teenage girls will be expelled from school, and at a faster rate. At two points in its Report, the Stasi Commission registers its distress at the recent growth of de-schooling. The law based on its recommendations

will undoubtedly contribute to the phenomenon it deplores. Elsewhere, the Report acknowledges in heartfelt terms the 'drama' of teenage girls' lives on the streets of our cities. But how will the banning of the headscarf *inside schools* transform life outside? We are told that it will constitute a 'strong sign', addressed to 'Islamic groups'. It seems more probable that it will give them free rein to denounce this attack on freedom of belief, and rally more young people—teenage girls in particular—to their cause.

In sum, the new law will bring no useful reforms. It will have nil effect on the problem of racial exclusion, or that of sexual inequality—areas in which real progress depends very little on legislation, far more on deeper forms of social transformation. Nor will the headscarf question now disappear, as if by magic wand. If it loses any of its acuity, this will only be due to a change in media focus.

Much ado about nothing? Not entirely. Imagine a hysterick whose phobia is centred on the idea of bodily dirt. In the grip of an irresistible compulsion, he washes his hands fifty times a day. The ritual is a protection from his inner fear; but it is more than that. Each time he performs the act, he gains a moment's respite, a temporary relief. The headscarf ban will have the same effect. Between July 3rd, 2003, when Chirac appointed the Stasi Commission, and February 10th, 2004, when the National Assembly voted by 494 to 36 in favour of legislation based on its recommendations, France has undergone a prolonged debate on the question. Politicians, journalists and intellectuals from every point of the compass have come together to assert their common celebration of Republican values against the Muslim schoolgirl menace. Such instances of fusion and unanimity are rare—and, in themselves, provide some temporary relief. The opponents of the headscarf can pride themselves on their valiant stand for the values of free expression and national cohesion against the 'obscure forces' on the prowl. In short, the process has brought a measure of national satisfaction which it would be wrong to scorn. True, such satisfaction will exact a price, but only the sceptics will notice. And even they will have to admire the way that, in the name of liberty and integration, it has been necessary to pass a bill whose most obvious effects will be to ban and to exclude.

A French-language version of this text will appear in *Mouvements*, and in *Le foulard islamique en questions*, edited by Charlotte Nordmann.

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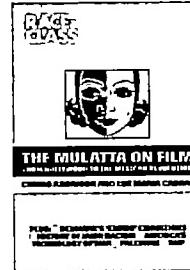
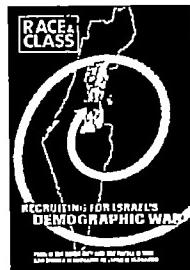
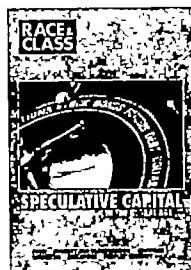
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RACE & CLASS

John Bowlt, Marc Konecny and Evgenia Petrova, eds, *A Legacy Regained: Nikolai Khardzhiev and the Russian Avant-Garde*
Palace Editions: St Petersburg 2002, hardback
400 pp, 3 935298 38 2

TONY WOOD

A FUTURIST ARK

In February 1997, a Russian artist named Aleksandr Brener was sentenced to 4 months' imprisonment by a Dutch court. His offence was to have spray-painted a large, green dollar sign on the white surface of Malevich's 'Suprematism (White Cross)', hanging in the Stedelijk Museum. In his defence, Brener claimed that his act of vandalism was intended as a protest against the merciless commercialization of art—a crude and misdirected gesture, to be sure; but the perpetrator's argument was to a certain extent borne out by the fact that deliberations at his trial focused on a monetary assessment of the damage he had caused, rather than any aesthetic harm he had inflicted. Acts such as Brener's have, however, done nothing to halt the seamless integration of Russia's revolutionary art into the circuits of the contemporary capitalist market. Works by Malevich or El Lissitzky now fetch vast sums at auction—Malevich's 'Suprematist Composition' (1919–20), for instance, sold for \$77m in May 2000. Aware of the value of such paintings, Malevich's descendants have also launched several legal claims disputing Western art institutions' ownership—in one case successfully extracting \$5m in compensation from MoMA.

The inflated prices and heightened litigiousness that now surround the Russian avant-garde are a function both of its increased art-historical status, and of the relative paucity of materials for sale: most of the key works are either in Russian state museums, or closely guarded by major Western institutions such as the Stedelijk. Any new discovery is apt to cause excitement in academia, and tremors in the market. Nikolai Khardzhiev, a Soviet scholar who amassed a vast collection of paintings, drawings and manuscripts by many of the key figures in Russian art and literature of the early twentieth

century, became the cause of much upheaval when he emigrated to the West in 1993, along with half of his archive. Khardzhiev had been instrumental in the rediscovery of the avant-garde in the 1960s, and left the turbulence of Yeltsin's Russia for Holland in an attempt to save his collection—only to find a morass of theft and corruption. *A Legacy Regained* is a huge and lavishly produced volume dedicated to his life and work, containing testimony from his acquaintances, articles written by Khardzhiev himself and texts he edited for publication, as well as materials from his archive. The core of the book is, in fact, based on a two-volume edition of Khardzhiev's writings that came out in Russia in 1997, but almost all the material is presented in English for the first time. The editors refer to their selection as a 'tantalizingly small sampling of the archive', which is still in the process of being classified and itemized; even at this stage, however, it is clear that Khardzhiev's collection will be of incalculable value to historians of the movement.

Nikolai Khardzhiev was born in 1903 in Kakhovka, in present-day Ukraine, into a white-collar family; the surname, and Khardzhiev's features, bespeak Caucasian origins, but he was seemingly loath to discuss his own biography, of which few details are available. After graduating from school in Kakhovka in 1920, he briefly worked for his local section of the Commissariat of Enlightenment before studying law in Odessa from 1922–25. Literature, however, was his true vocation, and it was on this subject that he lectured in Odessa workers' clubs and the city's State Institute of Cinema. Living in the garrulous, cosmopolitan city of Babel's tales, Khardzhiev befriended the poet Eduard Bagritskii, who was instrumental in his move to Moscow in the autumn of 1928. Bagritskii was linked to the Constructivist artists, writers and critics of *Novyi LEF*, and it was through him that Khardzhiev met Osip Brik, Viktor Shklovskii and Boris Eikhenbaum. Shklovskii—for whom Khardzhiev briefly worked as an assistant—and Brik were the two sponsors of Khardzhiev's application to join the Union of Writers in 1940; it was Eikhenbaum, meanwhile, who shortly after Khardzhiev's arrival in Moscow took him to a reading by the absurdist writers Danil Kharms, Aleksandr Vvedenskii and Nikolai Zabolotskii, where he met Malevich. Soon he was acquainted with what remained of the entire Russian avant-garde—artists such as Vladimir Tatlin and El Lissitzky, the poets Vladimir Maiakovskiy and Aleksei Kruchenykh, and critics such as Nikolai Punin (see NLR 10).

Through Bagritskii, Khardzhiev also met Osip Mandelshtam, who would often visit his tumbledown wooden house in the Mariina Roshcha area of Moscow, and claimed that Khardzhiev had 'perfect pitch for poetry'. Akhmatova, whom Khardzhiev met in the 1930s, also appreciated his literary gifts and, until her death in 1966, would often turn to him for advice; she claimed to be delighted by Khardzhiev's admission that he didn't

actually like her poetry. It was Mandelshtam's confidence in Khardzhiev that persuaded the poet's widow to entrust him with the task of preparing Mandelshtam's works for publication. Though a selection finally appeared in 1973—no small feat in Brezhnev's USSR—Nadezhda Mandelshtam and Khardzhiev had quarrelled bitterly over the editing of the poems, their prior publication in the US, and Khardzhiev's apparent hoarding of the manuscripts. Indeed, alongside his broad and brilliant set of acquaintances, constant disagreements seem to be another feature of Khardzhiev's life. He fell out with Lili Brik, Maiakovsky's former mistress, when she married the Maiakovsky scholar Vasilii Katanian—as Khardzhiev put it in a revealing interview of 1991, included in this volume, 'Caesar's wife should not marry his janitor'. According to several of the contributors to *A Legacy Regained*, he also had some long-standing but obscure grievance against Shklovskii, with whom, according to the art historian Vasilii Rakitin, he 'feuded silently over Futurism, the exactitude of facts, and women.'

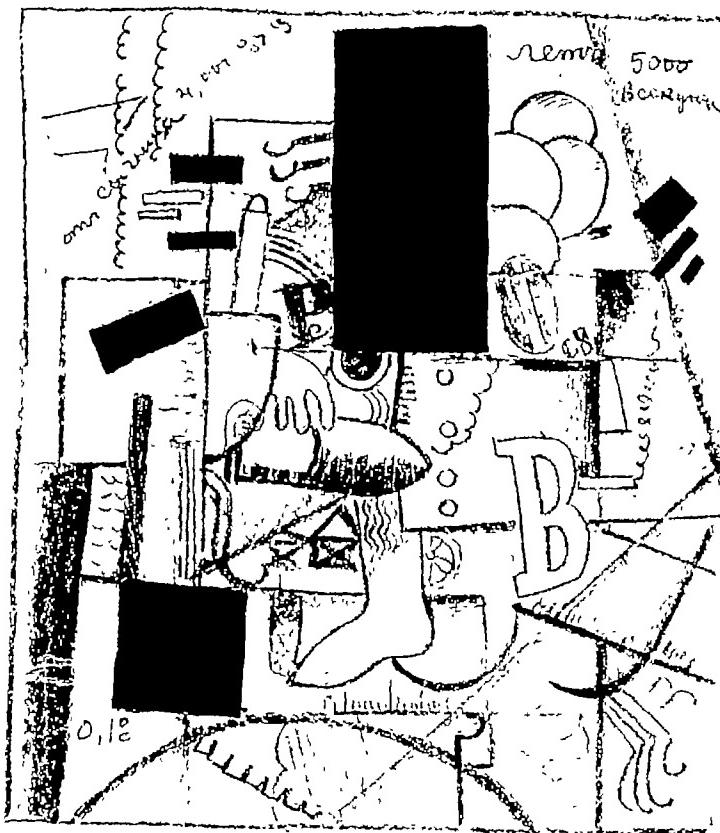
From reading Khardzhiev's own painstaking work, one can see how irritated he would have been by Shklovskii's aphoristic and oblique style. *A Legacy Regained* contains a handful of Khardzhiev's essays, notable not only for their meticulous attention to historical detail, but for an interdisciplinary approach and breadth of comparative scope that would have been rare in the USSR under Stalin. In an essay on the links between avant-garde poetry and painting, there are references to Mallarmé, Apollinaire and Cendrars, as well as to the classical poetry of Ausonius, Pentadius and Porphyry. But as time goes on, contemptuous references to the work of others multiply, whether it be memoirs by acquaintances of Velimir Khlebnikov—adjudged 'prolix', full of 'insipid word-spinning and tedious anecdotal detail'—or Western scholarship as a whole: there are dozens of corrections and reprimands for many scholars who went on to contribute to the present volume. Though many of the remembrances of Khardzhiev published here praise his energy, conversational brilliance and considerable expertise, it is clear that he was a difficult person to deal with. John Bowlby notes that Khardzhiev was 'described variously as "gruff", "a recluse", "a dog in a manger", "acerbic", "smart", and "omniscient"'; for Szymon Bojko, he was 'a dangerous, silent god upon his own Olympus'.

Khardzhiev's seemingly unassailable authority stemmed, of course, from his personal knowledge of many of the key figures of the avant-garde. By the late 1920s, he had evidently decided that his life's mission would be to preserve the textual and pictorial traces of the Russian pre-Revolutionary art scene; at first, he envisaged writing a 'History of Russian Futurism', and under this pretext began to amass paintings, manuscripts and books. He acquired a pristine set of Futurist publications, and the extremely rare output of the Supremus group of Malevich's pupils from his Vitebsk phase.

Khardzhiev's documentary wealth amounts to several dozen files, and includes an unfinished autobiography by Malevich, written at his prompting in the early 1930s—though Khardzhiev published much of this in Sweden in 1976, with the help of his friend Roman Jakobson. There are also manuscripts of theoretical articles by Malevich and Lissitzky, and correspondence between the two; letters from Olga Rozanova to Kruchenykh; a handwritten version of the latter's seminal 'transrational' manifesto, 'Declaration of the Word as Such'; sections of Goncharova's diary; and much more that has yet to be catalogued, including various papers relating to figures such as Khlebnikov, Mandelshtam and Akhmatova.

The documentary part of Khardzhiev's collection is currently divided between Amsterdam and Moscow; however, the paintings and drawings that many will regard as the jewels of the collection—over 1,600, of which around a hundred are handsomely reproduced here—were all smuggled out of Russia in 1993. According to the Stedelijk's chief curator Geurt Imanse, Khardzhiev had amassed 172 works by Malevich, 122 by Mikhail Larionov, 51 by El Lissitzky, 46 by Rozanova, as well as a handful of drawings and paintings each by Tatlin, Natalia Goncharova, Maiakovsky, Vasilii Kandinsky, Gustav Klucis and the Burliuk brothers. The Malevich drawings are notable above all for the unprecedentedly clear picture they give of the evolution of Suprematism from the painter's Cubist and Alogist phases. Several different painterly languages inhabit the preparatory sketches he made (see opposite) for the Futurist opera *Victory over the Sun* in 1913—Cubism's dissections of space, the absurd juxtapositions of Alogism, the floating geometric shapes of Suprematism—acting as both visual *summa* and incubator for future forms. They have made an immediate impact; indeed, the organizers of last year's impressive 'Suprematism' exhibition at the New York Guggenheim described the drawings from Khardzhiev's collection as its 'raison d'être'. Given the comparative lack of reliable materials on the avant-garde as a whole, Khardzhiev's vast trove of undeniably authentic works and texts not only fills various gaps in our knowledge of the period, but provides a solid basis for authentication in a field awash with fakes. An *Art News* article of 1996 estimated there to be between 6,000 and 8,000 forged works purportedly by members of the Russian avant-garde, and pointed out that for some artists—notably Nina Kogan, a pupil of Malevich—an entire œuvre has been faked.

By the mid 1930s, Khardzhiev's researches into the avant-garde had become an increasingly dangerous undertaking, and his gathering of materials a secretive, underground activity. His ostensible occupation, as of 1932, was that of a Maiakovsky scholar. The poet's suicide in 1930 left the way open for his sanctification by the Stalinist literary establishment, which duly began the process of encasing Maiakovsky's revolutionary verse in a suitably austere thirteen-part *Complete Works*; Khardzhiev edited the first two



© Kazimir Malevich-Dagga Cultural Foundation/Stedelijk Museum

Kazimir Malevich, Curtain design for *Victory over the Sun*, 1913

volumes. In 1947, after working on patriotic film scripts in Alma-Ata during the war, Khardzhiev joined the academic council of the Maiakovsky Museum. It was here that during the Khrushchev thaw he organized a series of exhibitions—under the tenuous rubric of ‘Illustrators of Maiakovsky’—that played a crucial role in the rediscovery of the avant-garde. Shows devoted to Lissitzky, Klucis and Pavel Filonov in 1960 and 61 were followed by displays of works by Malevich and Tatlin (1962) and Goncharova and Larionov (1965).

By this time, Khardzhiev’s expertise and fabled collection had become the object of pilgrimages by scholars from both East and West. The

Chuvash poet and former colleague of Khardzhiev, Gennadii Aigi, recounts how Khardzhiev personally, in a single sitting, corrected the manuscript of Camilla Gray's groundbreaking *The Russian Experiment in Art* (1962). Describing a 1968 visit to Khardzhiev's apartment, the art historian Galina Demosfenova recalls 'a dark entrance hall, a dimly lit room, many sealed bookcases and a large desk. The walls were covered with pictures, but I was too timid to examine them. All in all, the surroundings were those of the old Moscow intelligentsia'. If initially he seemed forbidding, later visitors found Khardzhiev mistrustful—occasionally refusing even to undo the chain, preferring to talk from behind the door. By the early nineties, he was obsessed by the possibility of his collection being stolen or dispersed. His mistrust of the new Russian authorities' willingness to preserve it intact, and fear of the mafia, led him to emigrate to the Netherlands in November 1993 with half of the collection stashed in his suitcases.

If Khardzhiev's experience of the Soviet Union had been one of evasive, quiet labours of historical preservation, his arrival in the West set off a shabby sequence of betrayals and frauds. Prior to his emigration, he had signed a contract with the Swiss-based Galerie Gmurzynska whereby he was given \$2.5m in exchange for four Malevich paintings and two drawings—around a tenth of their actual value. In Amsterdam, he and his wife lived surrounded by shady advisers, one of whom quietly sold items from the collection and compelled them to change their wills and the by-laws of the foundation they established to protect the archive. Khardzhiev's wife Lydia Chaga died in suspicious circumstances in late 1995; though no foul play is alleged regarding the death of Khardzhiev himself in March 1996, several more paintings—at least \$12.5m worth—were sold to the Galerie Gmurzynska after his death, before the Dutch journalist Hella Rottenberg raised the alarm. The pictorial materials and the half of the textual archive Khardzhiev succeeded in smuggling out of Russia are now in the custody of the Stedelijk Museum, despite intermittent grumbling from the Russian authorities, who in February 1994 impounded the other half of the documents and manuscripts at Moscow airport—a customs officer had recognized a photograph of Maiakovsky. Yet although the Russian government was able to stop what it saw as invaluable cultural patrimony from leaving the country, the materials remained Khardzhiev's private property, and he was therefore legally entitled to take the vindictive step, shortly before his death, of sealing off the impounded part of his archive until 2015. So far, only the FSB, the KGB's successor agency, has had access to these papers; work on cataloguing items currently in Holland, meanwhile, has only just begun, and is rendered all the more difficult by the collection's dispersal and inaccessibility. Proposals have recently been floated for its reunification, with the Stedelijk perhaps keeping electronic or microfilm copies in exchange for the return of the

originals to Russia. Any negotiations along these lines, though, are likely to be lengthy and labyrinthine.

Few of the squalid details of Khardzhiev's last years are to be found in *A Legacy Regained*—perhaps not surprisingly, since the volume was put out as a combined initiative of the Galerie Gmurzynska and the publishing arm of the State Russian Museum, and contains contributions from staff of the Stedelijk. The tone throughout is one of reconciliation and dignified commemoration—in notable contrast to the lyricism of the voluminous *Festschrift* for Khardzhiev published in Moscow in 2000—perhaps tinged with a certain relief that this cantankerous character, with his biting tongue and what one contributor calls his ‘territorial fanaticism’, will no longer disturb the critical and commercial peace. But *A Legacy Regained* performs a valuable service in acquainting Anglophone readers with a figure who served as a living link between the revolutionary artistic vanguard and the present, and the materials in the Khardzhiev collection are a stunning record of the turbulent, unprecedented creativity of that period.

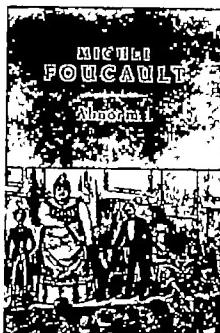
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Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *Democracy Realized: The Progressive Alternative*

Verso: London and New York 2000, £12, paperback
309 pp, 1 85984 009 4

MICHAEL RUSTIN

A PRACTICAL UTOPIANISM?

'A Work in Constructive Theory' was the subtitle of Roberto Mangabeira Unger's massive three-volume treatise, *Politics*, first published in 1987. It offered not only a theory of social organization in the first volume, *Social Theory: Its Situation and Task*, and a sweeping historical panorama that embraced agrarian empires from the Han to the Mughals, in the third, *Plasticity into Power*. It also proposed—in the 680-page centrepiece, *False Necessity*—an alternative account of the rise of the main institutional features of mass society, a theory of subjectivity and a programme for radical political, economic and micro-cultural change. This was, by any standards, a substantial body of work. The scion of a famous political family from Brazil's northeastern state of Bahia, Unger has taught critical legal theory at Harvard Law School since 1979. His contributions in this field are closely connected to his social theory and political prognostications. His 1986 *The Critical Legal Studies Movement*—a succinct text of only 128 pages—anticipates to a striking extent many of the themes and arguments of *Politics*.

Grand projects such as Unger's are always vulnerable to historical events. Appearing at a time when a third of the world was governed by Communist regimes, the *Politics* trilogy aimed to formulate a theory and programme of radical social change that would be an alternative both to mass-industrial capitalism and to state-socialist and social-democratic models. After the end of the Cold War, and with the neoliberal model now in crisis in his native Latin America, how has Unger's thought weathered the upheavals of the past decades? *Democracy Realized*, published in 1998 and recently reissued, opens with a strikingly optimistic appeal for 'alternative institutional forms

of economic, social and political pluralism'—accompanied by a sober recognition that:

Everywhere in the world, there is today an experience of exhaustion and perplexity in the formulation of credible alternatives to the neoliberal programme and to its defining belief in convergence toward a single system of democratic and market institutions. Having abandoned statist commitments and witnessed the collapse of communist regimes, progressives look in vain for a direction more affirmative than the rearguard defence of social democracy

Even in the United States, the world's hegemonic power and richest nation, 'ordinary working citizens are likely to feel themselves angry outsiders, part of a fragmented and marginalized majority, powerless to reshape the collective basis of the collective problems they face'. At the same time, the American political intelligentsia derides large-scale projects of institutional reform and popular political mobilization as romantic and impractical, insisting instead upon technical policy analysis and 'problem-solving by experts'. Yet, Unger argues,

This programmatically empty and de-energized politics fails to solve the practical problems for whose sake it renounced larger ambitions. It . . . allows itself to degenerate into short-term and episodic factional deals, struck against a background of institutions and assumptions that remain unchallenged and even unseen.

Instead, the most apparent grounds for hope lie in the 'vigorous underground experimentalism' that is making itself felt in new working practices and educational methods, where 'co-operation and competition combine' and 'permanent innovation becomes the touchstone of success'. At present, this imaginative boundary-pushing within the miniaturized worlds of firm or school ends up hitting the 'limits imposed by the untransformed public world'. Nevertheless, for Unger such processes are the seedbed for a new political practice: 'democratic experimentalism', the core idea of *Democracy Realized*, and defined here as a 'motivated, sustained and cumulative tinkering with the arrangements of society'.

The book's structure is as ambitious and unconventional as Unger's earlier works, if on a smaller (300-page) scale. Proposals for the transformation of the productive process in the advanced capitalist economies are followed by strategic agendas for three major countries in the developing and post-Communist world (Russia, China, Brazil); a thorough-going programmatic 'alternative to neoliberalism', ranging from tax and pension reforms and emancipatory schooling to new kinds of investment and productive practice; and finally, a Manifesto, summarizing these proposals in thirteen major theses. Responding in part to criticisms—some made in the pages of this

journal: see Perry Anderson's 1989 essay, 'Roberto Unger and the Politics of Empowerment', *NLR* 1/173—of the abstractness, or 'dream-like' quality of his work, Unger here makes a sustained and vigorous attempt to give his ideas direct political effect. The concept of democratic experimentalism is posited upon an overlap between the conditions necessary for 'practical progress'—that is, for the economic growth which 'lifts from human life the burden of drudgery and infirmity. We cannot be free when we are weak'—and those necessary for individual emancipation. Both material and subjective forms of progress, it is argued, depend on the capacity to transform social effort into a process of 'collective learning', undeterred by deference towards any pre-established social divisions or roles; a Freire-esque formulation which draws on themes that have long been central to Unger's work.

A particular feature of *Democracy Realized* is its combination of core and periphery agendas. It proceeds via a discussion of the economic and social 'vanguards' and 'rearguards' in the current world division of labour, which clearly draws on the Brazilian experience of polarization between a highly unionized, minoritarian industrial proletariat and a far larger, informal working-class sector, yet remains universal in its application. The question posed is whether the defence of group interests here must necessarily remain 'conservative and exclusive', preserving established privilege; or whether it could become what Unger calls 'transformative and solidaristic'—unionized workers finding common cause with casual labourers in supporting schemes for decentralized access to venture capital, for example.

Unger here opposes his progressive alternative not just to neoliberal orthodoxy but to Keynesian welfarist doctrines and statist developmentalism. Import substitution and the creation of a protected industrial sector have served only to divide the working population between a privileged minority and an excluded majority. Attempts to sustain this economy by government spending have inevitably resulted in inflationary crises and, eventually, catastrophic exposure to market-led restructuring. To avoid these cyclical outcomes, Unger recommends a 'productivist' strategy that would change the balance between the innovative, capital- and skill-rich, vanguard segments of the economy, and its routine, low-skill, subordinate rearguard branches. New capital-allocating agencies, in themselves part of a democratization of property rights, should invest in vanguard forms of production in order to expand the sphere of fulfilling and creative work, in contrast to the routinized and authoritarian conditions of rearguard labour.

The case for democratic productivism is an interesting one; it was prefigured in miniature in the Greater London Council's alternative to 'passive welfarism' in the late 1970s. In the context of Latin America, the productivist argument makes sense as a response to the specific weakness of economies that have hitherto been dominated by 'peripheral Fordism' and the export

of raw materials, and have lacked the high-tech, high-skill components of metropolitan centres of production. Unger advocates increased levels of savings and investment, and—following the example of Japan and the East Asian tigers—the creation of ‘leading sectors’ of the economy, as a way of escaping from dependency. In the us context, by contrast, the productivist strategy is aimed not at increased productivity but rather towards the goals of social equality and democratization of the labour process.

Unger describes the theses of *Democracy Realized* as compatible with the ‘family of views’ he explored in his earlier work. What were their determining features? *False Necessity*, the keystone of the *Politics* trilogy, sought to construct a radical alternative to two major ideological adversaries: ‘positivist, empiricist or conventional social science’, and Marxism. The first was most critically represented as the discipline of neo-classical economics, but Unger also attacked positivist social science more generally, for seeing ‘social life as an interminable series of episodes of interest-accommodation and problem-solving’. It denied the contrast between the shaping context and the shaped routine, ‘weakening our ability to see a whole institutional and imaginative ordering of social life as something connected, distinctive and replaceable’.

But it was the second adversary, Marxism—which, unlike social-science orthodoxy, shared Unger’s commitment to a transformation of the ruling order—that was the principal object of his critique of ‘necessitarian’ social theory, the ‘false necessity’ of his title. Unger argued against deep-structure theories that stressed the determining effects of underlying frameworks or social forces. He rejected the idea of indivisible, repeatable types of social organization, realized historically ‘on the basis of law-like tendencies and deep-seated economic, organizational or social constraints.’ He denied that such laws could be valid, that there was ‘a finite list of possible types of organization or a small number of trajectories of social evolution’, necessary ‘stages of development’, or particular class formations defined by their relation to the means of production. Where positivist social science had been condemned for making too little of social constraints, deep-structure theory was criticized for making too much of them. One result of this was to see political agency as a transformative force *created* by social and political action: Unger holds that a political party or movement constructs its following, rather than functioning as its expression or reflection. As he had already observed in *The Critical Legal Studies Movement*, his own counter-programme ‘seems to require an extreme and almost paradoxical voluntarism’; but this was justified on the grounds that it only ‘takes the preconceptions of liberal legal and political theory seriously and pushes them to their conclusion’.

The Marxist modes of thought rejected here are characterized in rather general terms within the main text of *False Necessity*. Most of Unger’s detailed

argument with these positions is consigned to an appendix of bibliographical notes. Here he acknowledges that a debate with 'necessitarianism' has taken place within the Marxist tradition, for instance in the polemic between Edward Thompson and Louis Althusser; but argues that the outcomes of this debate resolved none of the innate problems. Since these and other efforts at revision have failed, it is time to construct a new theoretical model. This decision appears somewhat over-determined, since it is not clear that what he brings off could not have been achieved as a variant of, or in dialogue with, Marxist ways of thinking just as well as by their rejection. There seems something recognizably postmodern in Unger's critique of necessitarian models—grand narratives, in another terminology—as well as in his 'extreme and paradoxical' voluntarism. Could this insistence on historical contingency, on the role of action and will in political development, owe something to Unger's own Latin American formation, as it has done perhaps in the work of Ernesto Laclau (Argentinian by origin) or, in a different context, that of Nicos Mouzelis, from Greece? In societies where the powers of state, junta and ideology (e.g. populism) might seem to have trumped the evolving hegemony of social classes, deterministic historical models may appear irrelevant—as for the Bolsheviks in 1917, when it came to the point.

Indeed, Unger's work brings to mind another substantial tradition of social science, distinct from and antagonistic to Marxism: academic sociology. As Göran Therborn argued in his 1976 *Science, Class and Society*, the modern founders of sociology deliberately set out to create a third path of scientific explanation, critique and reform between the individualism of economics and empiricist philosophy, and Marxist collectivism and revolutionism. This was most clearly manifest in Weber's work, which sought to revise Marx's theories of the origins of capitalism, class and state. But the commitment of the emergent discipline to the primacy of 'the social' (against the economic and the psychological), and of 'social solidarity' (against the ubiquity of conflict), revealed its ambition to correct the destabilizing tendencies within capitalism by means of scientifically informed understanding, put at the disposal of public bureaucracies. Close links were established at various points between academic sociology and social-democratic policies—in the construction of the British and Swedish welfare states, for example, and the New Deal in the United States.

Unger's opposition to deep-structure theories may be seen as analogous to the rejection of 'general theories' in favour of 'theories of the middle range', of the kind promulgated by Robert Merton and earlier developed in Weber's work. Unger rejects the idea that capitalism is a unitary phenomenon, a mode of production with systemic consequences for different levels of the social order and its own laws of development. Instead, he points to its

plasticity and historical variations—contrasting East Asian, North American and European forms.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to generate a unifying description of the contemporary social order, as Unger does, without deploying generalizing concepts of some kind. Where do these come from in his work? Weber argued that sociological explanations begin with problems that are based on the values of those who investigate them. Once a problem has been formulated, however, analysis must proceed on an objective basis, seeking to establish the truth regardless of its implications for the moral position that defined the problem in the first instance. This seems to be the essence of Unger's procedure. The shaping problem of his work—flowing from his conception of human potential—is that the subordination of individuals to social roles and institutions ('entrenchment') leads to the denial of their autonomy and choice. This conception has affinities with the Marxist idea of reification and, as Anderson has pointed out, with the 'practico-inert' of Sartre, whom Unger acknowledges as a philosophical influence. The social transformation that he seeks—the essence of his radical vision—is from a society in which such structures are fixed and permanent, forming the experience of its members, towards one in which roles and institutions are continually renegotiated and reshaped through free individual interaction and choice. Unger describes this as 'negative capability', borrowing the term from Keats; though where the poet implied by it a form of mental receptivity that would permit interior imaginative creativity, Unger intends a conception of public action, within a context of reflexivity and transparency. (The psycho-social dimension to this argument is set out in his 1984 book, *Passion: an Essay on Personality*.)

Unger's primary concern, therefore, is to understand the social processes that obstruct or facilitate 'disentrenchment'—and the negative capability this permits. He deploys several 'middle-range' theories to this end, in a form of analysis that owes something to Weber's ideal types. What interests Unger in particular is the tendency of societies to return to a state of 'closure' or 'entrenchment', in the face of efforts to open them up and create free spaces for choice within them. He explores both the cyclical patterns of conflict endemic to agrarian empires and ancient city-states—an 'oscillating equilibrium' between central power and peripheral magnates—and the reform cycles of modern democracies, in which reforming governments encounter sanctions by power-holders (e. g., capital strike or flight) that force them to retreat, to avoid destabilization and consequent electoral defeat. Unger perceptively applies the centre-periphery model of conflict to twentieth-century communist societies: post-revolutionary Russia, the Cultural Revolution, workers' self-management in Yugoslavia. The dynamic, whereby each element in the various configurations—agrarian empires,

city-states, capitalist democracies and communist powers—retains a capacity to influence the others, relates to an underlying model of social power embodied in the patron-client bond.

Since any general theory of historical change has been excluded as illegitimate, it is not easy to see how escape from these oscillations—between openness and closure, entrenchment and disentrenchment—can occur. Unger does see that 'context-shaping' action is possible for collective as well as individual actors: modernizing monarchs or governments, for example. But he does not recognize the possibility of any tendential historical logic, brought about by competitive advantages due to economic, technological or military innovation, for example. Yet it is surely tendential development that explains why such configurations of power have not only reproduced themselves in recurring cycles, but have sometimes given rise to more complete and disruptive transformations. Unger argues against 'deep structure' theories but it seems to me that his deployment of a cyclical model of social process, though anti-historicist, nevertheless relies on a specific form of deep structural theory.

One particular set of institutional structures is central to Unger's analysis: the twentieth-century system of mass production and consumption that has been defined, following Gramsci, as Fordism. The linked power systems of the large capitalist corporation and bureaucratic state are seen here as the primary obstacle to the creation of a disentrenched social order, in which all can share in the definition and shaping of their social context and culture. Consistent with his 'anti-necessitarianism', Unger argues that there are no over-riding reasons why this institutional complex should have become—or should now remain—dominant in modern society. Systems of mass production enjoy no *sui generis* advantages of technology or efficiency, but have acquired their privileged position through contingent political victories. A central plank of Unger's argument is that the mode of petty-commodity production dominant in an earlier phase of capitalism need not have been defeated, so to speak, in its historic competition with mass-industrial forms. His political programme involves restoring the condition of dominance of this earlier system, though in a technologically up-to-date version. It is by this means that society can reap the benefits of market competition, innovation and enhanced productivity, while avoiding the disadvantages of entrenched inequality, enforced subordination and role-passivity. Unger holds that it is characteristic of modern mass-production systems that they confine 'negative capability'—choice, autonomy, innovative activity—to the vanguard sectors of the economy, while condemning the majority to dull routine work. The building-block of Unger's new democratic social order is to be the (preferably small) independent firm,

which obtains its capital through social licence rather than possessing it by unfettered and transferable property right.

There is a link between Unger's commitment to a form of production pre-dating the industrial corporation and the affinity of his ideas to those of academic sociology. As agents for their compromise social formation, the classical sociologists needed an intermediary class, placed between the emerging mass proletariat of industrial society and its elite captains and financiers. Durkheim's 'organic solidarity'—a complex division of labour and normative order that would facilitate innovation and individual freedom—seems a precursor of the 'disentrenched' and pluralist social forms advocated by Unger. Another pre-echo would be the social-insurance and welfare schemes of nineteenth-century Co-operative and Friendly Societies, self-governing institutions that were the creation of skilled handicraft workers—leading some to mourn the decline of the artisanal 'labour aristocracy' and its early hegemony over the working class movement. In this perspective, mass production created conditions in which the enlarged bureaucratic state came to be seen as the most effective defender of working-class interests, especially those of unskilled workers; and then overwhelmed rivals to its power.

In the era of globalization and 'risk society' that has dawned since Unger's *Politics* trilogy appeared, disentrenchment seems a more problematic idea. Fordism and its accompanying welfare settlement is no longer the dominant model, but is in rapid process of dissolution and dispersal. Far from finding themselves 'entrenched' in excessively solid and impermeable institutions of employment, regulation and welfare, many—whether in First or Third worlds—now find themselves in situations of excessive competitive pressure and vulnerability. An unspoken assumption of Unger's critique of dominant social forms in the 1980s was that they offered, if anything, too much security, and too little freedom and choice. But from the perspective of 2004, that seems an underestimation of the value of dependable social arrangements, even if these come with a cost. The collapse of Communism has given these questions even more significance in the East. Many who opposed the oppressiveness and inertia of those societies in the 1980s would now place a different value on the relative security of their welfare provision and 'jobs for life'. In post-Communist countries as in European social democracies, the destructuring of previous forms of social containment combined with economic uncertainty has helped to mobilize antagonism towards outsiders and potential competitors. Both the 'war on terrorism' and current hostility towards refugees feed off these insecurities.

Deeper questions relate to whether Unger's ideal of human existence—a fully disentrenched, self-reflective and open-ended condition of context-shaping, rather than context-reproducing—is either desirable or possible.

Arguably, we have a greater innate need for 'givenness', continuities and the acceptance of dependency than Unger allows. Authentic relationships and experience are fashioned within cultures, traditions, institutions—or the interstices between them—in contexts of social density. From a psychoanalytic point of view, the unconscious is a necessary and unavoidable dimension of our mental process. It is the nature and severity of the inner conflicts that remain unconscious which give rise to problems of wellbeing and development, not the fact that reflexivity and self-transparency must be incomplete. The same is true of the 'cultural unconscious', that which remains implicit and taken for granted in any social arrangement. The search for greater autonomy, self-understanding and choice, both socially and individually—the aim of psychoanalysis, too—is not predicated on the understanding that a state of absolute freedom is either possible or desirable. The excessive valuation of self-determination was also a problem in Sartre's moral thinking. Social relatedness entails social constraints.

Unger's over-valuation of disentrenchment emerges as a more practical issue in the institutional reform at the core of his programme, its most distinctive 'big idea'—dismantling the unqualified right to private capital ownership that Anglo-American society now confers, and replacing it with a system of 'rotating' entitlements to capital, decided through a process of democratic debate. Unger proposes two procedures for this: rationing, i.e., centralized distribution, and auction, or a form of competitive bidding. The goal is clearly desirable from a democratic and egalitarian point of view, and one sees the force of Unger's objection to earlier attempts at redistribution—that both state ownership and worker ownership merely gave rise to different forms of 'entrenchment' and domination. However, his proposal for constant democratic decision-making to determine the allocation of capital pays scant regard to who will be doing the allocating, and by what means; and none to the question of what the current owners of capital might be getting up to politically whilst this fate is prepared for them. Little attention is given to the practicalities of incessant deliberation and decision-making, or to the uncertainty over productive resources that would ensue.

Here as elsewhere, Unger perhaps pays insufficient heed to the benefits of continuity—indeed, to the human necessity for some measure of 'entrenchment'. A feature of the current individualist, neo-conservative epoch has been the reckless squandering of the assets of institutional tradition and membership, in what one might term, after Marcuse, a condition of 'repressive liberalization'. His schema places a heavy burden on democratic decision-makers' capacity to maintain 'an ideal speech situation', and neglects the risk that such powers would entrench and engorge themselves. A pluralistic equilibrium between separate institutional agencies, and the devolution of power to employees, clients and customers, would seem a

surer way to balance different claims to capital resources than to vest all decision-making in a single centre of democratic sovereignty. Unger's model could risk becoming a condition of 'permanent revolution', as every allocation of capital and power is laid open to continuous political combat. Unger may envisage this process taking place according to the measured tempo of a court of law. But it might also degenerate into neo-Jacobin excess as conflicts arise within the polity, especially given the violent counter-revolutionary reaction that such moments are liable to provoke. The programme would be more convincing if he showed a greater understanding of social anxiety and fear, and of the reliance on traditions and legitimate authorities to allay such states of mind.

Unger wishes to retain the innovative dynamism of a capitalist mode of production, whilst depriving it of its tendencies to concentrate and reify institutional power. He insufficiently recognizes, however, the degree to which the potential for innovation is rooted in continuity, as well as in the negation of existing forms of order. He proposes to deprive capitalist firms of one of the key instruments that they have used to reproduce themselves, namely the power to reinvest their profits as capital. This power is here defined not as a reward for competitive success, but as the outcome of an earlier political victory over the allocation of rights to social property. In fact, it has both of these aspects. Institutions would have no incentive to be innovative or efficient if they could not retain some of the resources that follow from competitive success. There is a difficult balance to be struck between creating incentives for performance and avoiding the entrenchment of advantage, but it has to be aimed at if the benefits of innovation and productivity are to be retained. 'The edge of chaos', formulated by complexity theorists as the zone where most innovation takes place, is located on the boundary between order and structure, not in conditions where no order exists.

Four well-established spheres of entitlement are delineated in Unger's work. If the first of these, *market rights*—currently, the unfettered entitlement to private property—is the primary target of Unger's reform programme, he also pays significant attention to the others. The second sphere is *immunity rights*, which safeguard individuals against oppression. These include both civil rights and welfare entitlements—to subsistence, nourishment, health, housing and education. Here Unger proposes a guaranteed minimum income for all, but is emphatic that this should not include the right to a particular job. The third sphere involves *destabilization rights*: the right to challenge institutions and organizations, including freedom of speech and information. Anti-trust legislation, grievance procedures in the workplace, and health and safety legislation come into this category. The fourth category Unger terms *solidarity rights*, those which define the obligations

of social relationships: the responsibilities of marriage partners, of parents towards children, of teachers, social workers, doctors, etc., towards their pupils, clients or patients. In this area, law clearly shades into custom, convention and ethical obligation. Unger argues that solidarity rights are more often enforced by mediation than by juridical practice. He is critical of the single-minded preoccupation of positivist social science and private law with 'interests', holding that relationships and shared goods are also important matters for ongoing regulation.

In mapping these different fields of entitlement, and by his thorough-going critique of the unrestricted right to private property, Unger seeks to identify spaces for constructive and transformative social action, as well as defining areas for critical legal practice. The dismantling of undifferentiated 'totalities', such as the idea of property and capital, into their constituent dimensions, makes it possible to imagine how such norms and institutions could in practice be deconstructed, in order to neutralize their oppressive and 'entrenching' power. This particularization of institutional spaces in our society as fields for contestation, challenge and local democratic advance is a valuable contribution to the contemporary radical agenda.

Unger sets out powerful intellectual and practical tools for such political work. Once again, this piecemeal, transformative approach—the sustained and motivated 'tinkering' or experimentalism of *Democracy Realized*—is counterposed to deep-structural models of political change. For Unger, these lead to a politics that is revolutionary in its rhetoric but fatalist in its practice, since it assumes that without total systemic change there can be no significant reform whatsoever.

I have described the affinities between Unger's antagonism to both positivist individualism and Marxism, and the alternative to both these systems of thought developed within classical sociology. Arguably, parallels might also be drawn with a contemporary sociological critique of Marxism: that of Anthony Giddens. Unger's distinction between context-reproducing and context-defining activities explores ground similar to Giddens's 'structuration theory', which sought to resolve the 'structure-agency' opposition by showing that structures have to be continuously reproduced in social action. Giddens also aimed to replace class-based and materialist social models by an account that gave greater weight to 'choice', exercised either by individuals through markets or through the micro-level democratic revitalization of institutions, for example through 'active welfare'. With Ulrich Beck and others, he has argued that globalization has involved a process of 'disembedding' individuals from traditional constraints, with subjective consequences. He has argued for a state of 'reflexivity' and transparency in relationships, positions not unrelated to Unger's calls for 'disentrenchment' and 'negative capability'.

Despite these kinship features, however, Unger's programme points elsewhere. Market rights, as seen by the Third Way, involve the encroachment of private ownership on the public domain; Unger's 'rotation of capital' is intended to extend public, democratic control over resources that are currently in private hands. Immunity rights have been reduced by Third Way governments in the name of labour flexibility and greater competitiveness in global markets. Destabilization rights are informally curtailed through the continuing extension of private monopoly control over the mass media; and formally, through the sanctions of the war against terror. Solidarity rights tend increasingly to be dissolved, within Anglo-American market societies, into separate individual entitlements, privileging forms of social connexion that can most easily be formulated as specific contracts, and marginalizing those that depend on mutual trust.

At one level, Unger's critique of 'conservative social democracy', cited above, may seem to resonate with Third Way attacks on the 'initiative-sapping' welfare state. But where New Labour and the New Democrats have become agents of neoliberalism, seeking to defeat traditional social democracy and win consent for further marketization, Unger sets out a manifestly alternative path. As he has written elsewhere (see the Boutwood lectures of 2002, available on the excellent website devoted to his work):

The Third Way is the first way—the supposed one and only road to freedom and prosperity—sweetened with the sugar of compensatory social policy . . . Their programme is the programme of their conservative adversaries, with a discount. They appear on the historical stage as the humanizers of the inevitable, unable to give more than trivial content to the idea of progressive social reconstruction today.

In *Democracy Realized*, too, Unger remains defiantly committed to finding a radical alternative in the spirit of a new Left. The roots of this aspirational spirit, a valuable counterweight to neoliberal hegemony, lie perhaps in both sides of Unger's political formation, the Brazilian and the North American—elsewhere, he has written in praise of 'the spirit of American possibility' and the US as a 'country of experimenters'. Another source of his transformative faith may be the radical wing of Latin American Catholicism and its practical, democratic ideas. The possible emergence of Brazil within the G20, as a site of resistance to North American dominance, could serve to bolster Unger's political confidence. As a global democratic movement against neoliberalism seems to be growing—sustained by the internet, on which virtually all of Unger's writings are now freely accessible—his moment as an inspirational social theorist may be about to arrive. Let us hope so.

Benno Teschke, *The Myth of 1648: Class, Geopolitics and the Making of Modern International Relations*

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GOPAL BALAKRISHNAN

THE AGE OF WARRING STATES

According to conventional wisdom, 1648 marks the moment of creation: the inauguration of the modern inter-state system. The Peace tortuously negotiated in the Westphalian towns of Münster and Osnabrück—while half-starved mercenary armies, spurred on by France or Sweden, Austria or Spain, continued to ravage the farms, towns and villages of the German principalities—famously recognized the territorial sovereignty of the 300-odd states of the Holy Roman Empire. Their princes were freed from the imperial yoke, empowered to contract treaties with each other and with outside powers, sole rulers of their own dominions. French absolutism appears at the centre of this story, as the power that secured the diplomatic recognition of this pluriverse of sovereign states.

For Benno Teschke, in this ambitious if uneven work, the textbook narrative contains completely erroneous assumptions about when and where modernity began: 'Periodization is no innocent exercise, no mere pedagogical and heuristic device to plant markers in the uncharted flow of history. It entails assumptions about the duration and identity of specific epochs and geo-political orders.' The very title of the book signals the importance of representing the transition to capitalism and modern statehood in a narrative form, organized around landmark dates. Undaunted by the sheer number of events that have been posited as definitive starting points of modernity—in politics, economics, religion and even philosophy—Teschke maintains that the moment of inception was, in fact, the consolidation of parliamentary rule in England in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution. For it was then and there that the first properly capitalist state in world history was constituted.

Teschke sees this development rather than the Peace of Westphalia, forty years before, as the point of departure for the modernization of the European inter-state system. The eighteenth-century expansion of English capitalism set into motion the crisis of the European *ancien régime*, and eventually created the conditions for a new world order based on global capitalism. Understanding the genesis and expansion of capitalism as a process of modernization brings into focus the overarching historical trend-line. During the course of this long transition, the old predatory game of war and diplomacy broke down, and was replaced by another order. Capitalism is a social system in which the role of force in accumulating wealth has been eclipsed by the power of money invested in the means of production. The expansionary dynamic of this system should, over the long term, he argues, re-programme the prime directives of states towards the more or less peaceable promotion of economic development.

The Myth of 1648 takes aim at a series of international-relations models. A prime target is the Realist view that an anarchic system of strategic action, structured around the balance of power, emerges whenever states must fend for themselves or perish. From this Hobbesian perspective, the maxims of war and diplomacy have undergone no fundamental changes since the era of the Peloponnesian War. The transhistorical outlook of this school is resumed in Kenneth Waltz's observation: 'The enduring character of international politics accounts for the striking sameness in the quality of international life through the millennia.' Teschke aims to replace the static analytics of Realism with a historicism that comprehends a succession of qualitatively distinct geo-political orders from the Carolingian age to the present. His study distinguishes itself from a number of contemporary sociological critiques of Realism that offer their own versions of the origins of geo-political modernity yet remain, he argues, beholden to a mystifying schema of periodization structured around the inaugural moment of 1648.

While orthodox Realism cannot even acknowledge this transformation, Teschke argues that international-relations theories that seek to be historical are eclectic. Such accounts can only comprehend the advent of modernity as the coincidental confluence of bureaucratic rationalization, the recognition of absolute property rights, a new economic ethos and the spread of commerce. The syncretistic methodology of Max Weber lies behind these parables of modernization:

Any reconstruction of European history will therefore have to retrace the independent developmental logics of different social spheres (political, economic, legal, religious etc.) that never stand in any necessary relation of co-constitution but may or may not form 'elective affinities'.

A ‘coincidental conjuncture of an expandable list of contingencies’ merely describes aspects of this multi-level transition, however, without explaining how it was possible. Any such explanation must take the form of integrating all these series into a single developmental logic.

Teschke’s account of this epochal transformation relies heavily on the work of Robert Brenner, whose essays on the origins of agrarian capitalism and socio-political history of the English Revolution are arguably the definitive contributions to long-standing debates surrounding both topics. Brenner’s theoretical contribution is a rigorous clarification of how social-property relations determine the conditions of access to the means of subsistence, and thus the long-term developmental dynamics of entire societies. *The Myth of 1648* is an attempt to explain the formation and crisis of geo-political orders from the quotidian requirements of reproduction dictated by these social-property relations. For Teschke, ‘changes in property regimes restructure the identity of political communities and their distinct forms of conflict and cooperation.’

These property regimes set the terms for the production and appropriation of resources, and thus determine the agents and stakes of armed conflict. They are the ‘deep generative grammar and transformative logic of international relations’. Following Brenner, Teschke assembles the basic conditions of survival in a world of the plough and sword—with an emphasis on the specificities of European feudalism—and the pattern of cooperation, crisis and conflict that emerged from them. In his account, peasant households possessed the means of their subsistence and sought to produce the full range of their necessities themselves, rather than maximize their income. As a result of this lack of specialization, productivity remained low and the food supply uncertain. The systemic persistence of low levels of agricultural productivity, in turn, limited sustainable population growth, yet peasant households were compelled to have numerous children as security. This led to rising land/man ratios, the subdivision of plots, rising food prices and deteriorating levels of subsistence. These limits could be surmounted through colonization and reclamation of new lands but, as extensive expansion continued, ever less fertile land was brought into cultivation, exposing a growing population to diminishing returns and crop failure.

Because peasants possessed the means of production, a surplus could only be appropriated from them through coercion. Even when innovations to improve productivity could be implemented on a local scale, relying on coercion was an invariably cheaper and safer way to extract surplus. Predatory competition between the lords who possessed the means of coercion compelled the latter to form groups whose survival hinged upon building up an increasingly effective organization of tribute collection. This superincumbent weight of exploitation compounded the natural subsistence

predicament generated by population growth, subdivision and soil exhaustion, leading to catastrophic socio-demographic crises.

The problem is to explain how this stagnant Malthusian world eventually mutated into the dynamic international market society of the nineteenth century. Brenner has persuasively demonstrated how distinct property regimes emerged out of the class struggles between lords and peasants in different regions of Europe. He argues that it was the unusual resolution of the late-medieval English class struggle that sealed off its social evolution from the iron laws of warlordism and subsistence agriculture prevailing on the continent. Teschke characterizes this development as a secession from a multi-actor geo-political civilization, whose remote origins he reconstructs in a striking central chapter. The starting point for this continental order is the millennial collapse of Charlemagne's empire which, at its zenith, embraced Gaul, western and southern Germany, the northeastern Iberian peninsula and Lombardian Italy. 'Intra-ruling class struggle among late Frankish lords under outside pressure precipitated the implosion of the Carolingian Empire during the Feudal Revolution of the year 1000.' As this bucolic edifice crumbled, banal lordship—the right to levy fees and exact fines—tumbled downward from the imperial aristocracy to regional counts, and then finally to local castellans and manorial micro-lordships. The old Carolingian light cavalry and peasant infantries eventually gave way to heavy cavalry quartered in a new network of small stone castles. Swarming to these rural fortresses, motley crews of retainers formed a new layer of lesser nobles, 'trapped between impoverishment and adventure':

Armed, pretentious and poor, the knights clung to their stoned off space, talking of weapons and deeds, of strikes, of demands; of lucrative stratagems more than management or incomes.

Feudal society was organized as a ladder of conditional tenures contractually stipulating obligations of armed assistance between overlords and vassals. These political communities were not public orders but fluid ensembles of lordships, held together by their campaigns and through distribution of the spoils of war. The prizes at stake were estates picked up through feuds and inheritance, comprising an assortment of rent-generating rights over far-flung territories. Teschke highlights the private nature of feudal political power: 'Every lord was his own conflict unit.'

In this age of marauding chivalry, the European peninsula—previously the most backward zone of Eurasia—underwent an enormous material transformation as 'woods, marches, swamps, wastelands, alluvial lowlands, and even lakes and parts of the sea vanished to make room for ploughland'. European development also involved extensive military gains on the peripheries of the old Frankish empire: the reconquest of the Iberian peninsula;

the colonization of the Slavic-Baltic east by German lords, peasants and townsmen; the crusades that established the ephemeral principalities of Syria; the Norman conquest of England. Domination of these terrestrial peripheries resulted in the establishment of a maritime ascendancy over the Baltic, North Atlantic and Mediterranean.

Relentless political competition between feudal bands formed a field of selection in which 'the main causes for survival, transformation or decline have to be sought in the nexus between internal revenue extraction and productivity, i.e. in class relations'. This was because the outcomes of class conflict between lord and peasant determined the surpluses available for building up an effective war machine, vital for survival and expansion at the expense of competitors.

The need to attract and reward followers with gifts, equipment and fiefs stimulated the demand for artisanal crafts, purchased with part of the surplus taken from producers of food and raw materials. But the increasingly sophisticated urban commercial system that emerged from the expansion of this basic circuit did not dissolve systemic barriers to economic development, because marketable surpluses could only be garnered by squeezing taxes and rents from peasant cultivators for unproductive consumption and war. Although this commercialization hastened the decline of decentralized banal feudalism in Western Europe as villages secured their personal freedom in the aftermath of the late-medieval demographic collapse, outside of England it did not lead to the development of capitalism but rather to more centralized monetary forms of coercive surplus extraction.

On this landscape of micro-warfare, the boundaries between communities of vassals had been fluid and precarious. The subsequent consolidation of royal authority led to the incipient differentiation between the domestic and the military-diplomatic spheres of politics, and thus the reconstitution of anarchy on a more recognizably inter-state basis. Although this process has seemed to many the beginning of a Europe-wide transition to sovereign statehood, Teschke argues that radically different dynamics of state formation were unfolding under the cover of this common geo-political development. In fact, his entire narrative assumes that the onset of social and inter-state modernity can be told as a story of an ever-widening divergence between capitalist England and absolutist France. He argues that, while post-fourteenth century French society had ceased to be feudal, it was not moving towards capitalism, or even towards modern bureaucratic administration. The Kingdom of France emerged as a court-centralized system of the fiscal exploitation of independent peasants. As private feudal lordship eroded, venal office-holding came to replace it as the tap root of family fortunes.

By contrast, the centralized lordly community installed by Norman conquerors withstood the erosion of serfdom, enabling lords to hold onto large

holdings of land, even while they lost the coercive power to extract surpluses from their now largely free tenants. The old apparatus of lordly rule and the village community dissolved simultaneously, leading to the formation of property relations in which individual landlords and tenant farmers were dependent on the market for their inputs and incomes, and thus compelled to compete, specialize and invest. This set into motion a post-Malthusian 'virtuous cycle' of economic development which outstripped population growth, as an increasingly efficient agriculture sustained an ever-larger population, producing the manufactured inputs—purchased from rising farm incomes—that went into a progressive lowering of costs and increasing of yields.

But despite this striking long-term divergence of social structures, Teschke concedes that membership in a common European system of military and diplomatic competition led to an isomorphic convergence of institutional forms: military revolutions, monopolization of the means of legitimate violence, mercantilism and colonial slavery redefined the conditions of ruling and profiteering on both sides of the Channel. But while acknowledging these developments he is insistent that, in identifying the nature of states, institutional forms are separable from social content:

while the French state formation resulted in absolutist sovereignty, the cornerstone of the Westphalian state-system, English state formation resulted in capitalist sovereignty, the cornerstone of the post-Westphalian, i.e. modern state-system.

The problem with various contemporary attempts to historicize international relations, Teschke contends, is that they conflate absolutist with modern sovereignty. Having persuasively maintained that the agrarian social structures of France and England were developing along different paths towards distinct constitutional orders, he burdens his case with the drastic conclusion that France and England were 'incommensurable social totalities', unlike 'in all dimensions of society, economy and political organization'. Such assertions stand in an uneasy relationship to the parallels he registers. The narrative formula of modernization generates, at this point, a peculiar antinomy: the 'early modern' is left stranded as an anomalous socio-temporal category without any determinate relation to what follows.

His argument is on stronger ground when it avoids the pitfalls of this temporal schema, and establishes empirical criteria of classification. Weber's sociology of political institutions provides a clarifying distinction: 'All states may be classified according to whether they rest on the principle that the staff of men themselves own the administrative means, or whether the staff is "separated" from these means of administration.' The step towards a modern bureaucracy was not taken in France because an entrenched market

in venal offices prevented the formation of a true public domain. French absolutism was less a state than a hierarchical racket of sinecures to be pawned, sublet and divided upon inheritance. Teschke understands modernity to be a socio-juridical condition in which the political is *separated* from the economic. By this standard, the *ancien régime* was an early-modern dead end, lacking even the preconditions for a later transition to national capitalism. Gesturing towards its undeniable subsequent emergence, he suggests that 'the deeper preconditions for the state's withdrawal from direct economic exploitation', leading to the division of public and private, would not arise until some unspecified point in the nineteenth century.

The fiscal pump of this tax-office polity was constantly being tested in the arena of cabinet war and diplomacy, a system organized around the patrimonial pursuit of family fortunes. One could say that, of the two bodies of the king, Teschke only recognizes the private. '[The] basic units of international politics were not states but persons and associations of persons, who literally owned their respective realms and dominions.' He concludes that the geo-politics of the eighteenth century were not modern because the leading absolutist monarchies all strove for the medieval chimera of universal monarchy and the elimination of their adversaries, as opposed to a balance of power (with which, it appears, geo-political modernity can be equated). The evidence he adduces for this absence of an inter-state balancing mechanism is the extremely atypical case of the Polish partitions, for aside from that, no state of even modest size was eliminated from the map in this period—unlike the one that followed.

The historical viability of French absolutism was fatally diminished by the mounting costs of war with parliamentary England, generating an irreversible fiscal crisis that culminated in terminal bankruptcy. A stagnant agrarian social foundation of small peasant households could no longer sustain the costs of war on three continents. But for Teschke, the Great Revolution that erupted out of the meltdown of the *ancien régime* had little independent significance in the constitution of the modern state system: not just 1648 but, implicitly, 1789 as well is removed from this story of an exclusively English road to modernity. The unsettling deflation of this event follows from conclusions that some students of Brenner seem to have drawn from his account of absolutist society: a bourgeoisie of venal office holders, merchants and lawyers was merely the untitled rung of a plutocracy of rentiers living off the peasantry; its revolution amounted to a liquidation of clerico-aristocratic privileges, leaving the essential relationship of state to agrarian society more or less intact. It seems that such moments of revolutionary transformation are judged solely on the basis of whether or not they lead to the formation of capitalist civil societies, as if the term 'modernity' could now be purged of any association with other transitions, along

is. (Although Teschke claims that class struggles are the crucial process, after the property settlements of the late eighteenth century their importance seems to recede dramatically.) The domestic revolution is summarized in the following awkward and evasive conclusion:

In the institutional structure of the absolutist state, whose centralizations were radicalized by Napoleon, was the historical condition in which French capitalism would develop in the nineteenth century; it was not logically necessary for its development.

Perhaps not surprisingly then, the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars that transformed the map of Europe and set into motion its numerous subsequent national reconstructions are en bloc demoted to a mere manifestation, albeit indirect, of the geo-economic ascendancy of the United Kingdom.

After bold assertions of the categorical opposition between epochs and the states that epitomize them, Teschke equivocates as to whether England was, after all, the singular locus of the transition to (capitalist) modernity—or, alternatively, simply a highly distinctive participant in concurrent transitions unfolding across the *jus publicum europaeum*. At times he seems inclined to accept the latter, more plausible, option, asking whether we should ‘refine this simplified perspective by arguing the case for a series of transitions between and among distinct geo-political orders whose cumulative effect was the contemporary geo-political configuration?’ But his account of these processes more often seems to presuppose that the isolation of England’s socio-political evolution from the wider European inter-state field was a necessary condition of its subsequent transformative impact upon it. Logically, of course, this does not follow. ‘International military pressure had no influence on the English social revolution and little influence on the English political revolution.’ It should be said that there is little in Brenner’s account of the emergence of capitalist property relations or of the seventeenth-century English constitutional crisis to warrant such cut-and-dried formulations.

A more compelling explanation of the peculiar position of England within the absolutist system of war and diplomacy would take into account the geographical situations that generate the enduring strategic predicaments of state formation. Others have argued that an expensive build up of troop strengths was an indispensable condition of survival for the Renaissance monarchies on the mainland. The insular situation of the Tudor state freed it from this imperative, enabling its propertied classes to stave off the emergence of a tax-office court at a time when the most powerful states were assuming this form. For most of the early modern era England was simultaneously marginalized as a terrestrial force on the continent, yet

relatively secure from naval attack. As a result, Parliament's shift in focus shifted the direction of this build up towards Atlantic sea-power colonialism.

Relatedly, Teschke fails to register the relationship between seventeenth-century political crisis in England and the Europe-wide religious wars that formed its context of historical possibility. Politics is a sphere in which strategic projects directed at enemies take shape. The militant Protestantism of the parliamentary class was directed at the domestic and foreign bulwarks of Counter-Reformation absolutism. It was this strategic mediation that linked the domestic to the international. The characterization of early modern geo-politics as pure dynastic strife ignores the fault lines of the confessional war running through the leading states of the era, detonating many of its central friend-enemy oppositions.

Teschke's account of the transformative impact of the British regime on the European state-system focuses on the eighteenth century, when disputes over inheritance provided the typical occasion for hostilities. He suggests that this period simultaneously witnessed the inconspicuous beginnings of Albion's disengagement from a policy of territorial aggrandizement, and a drift towards its later commitment to off-shore balancing and colonial empire building. The crux of the narrative is the unintended geo-political fall-out of the United Kingdom's mounting fiscal superiority as a mercantile-military polity over its absolutist adversaries and allies: 'in the eighteenth century Britain was bellicose, militarized, and on a near permanent war footing, like any other comparable European power'. Although he does not specify the mechanism, it seems that it was through military pressure—not the pressure of market forces—that capitalism 'came to universalize its logic of political organization and international relations in the pluriverse created by absolutist state formation'.

Teschke sees this coexistence of qualitatively distinct social formations, subject to common standards of geo-political competition, as an eighteenth and early nineteenth-century story of the 'gradual crisis-ridden internationalization of the British state/society complex'. But the fact that the European pluriverse of antagonistic sovereign states was forged in the era of absolutism, and yet survived as the inter-state matrix of the core zone of world capitalism, strongly suggests that the struggle for power between states is not easily aligned to a logic of accumulation. This difficulty becomes acute when geo-politics becomes *separated* from the logic of accumulation, as Teschke thinks happened with the advent of capitalism. Under these conditions, it is arguable that the standard for determining the distribution of sovereign power acquires an autonomy as a force field of combined and uneven development, coercively mediating the inter-relationships between different social systems.

British naval victories in the Napoleonic Wars destroyed the mercantilist empires of France and Spain, establishing the conditions for an open world market based on the freedom of the seas: 'This new free trade regime brought with it forces that undermined the ancient logic of commercial capitalism during the nineteenth century, inaugurating the era of the emergent world market.' For Teschke, post-Westphalian modernity arrives with Britain's stabilization of a balance of power between European states, undergoing more or less successful structural adjustments to the world market. But the inter-state conventions of this first era of 'globalization' collapsed in the next century: why then are they canonical for understanding the relationship between capitalism and geo-politics?

At this point, we should recollect that Teschke proposed to 'historicize anarchy'—that is, provide an explanation of the formation of the conditions of possibility for this Realist schema. This raises the question as to whether he thinks Realism is wrong simply because it eternalizes 'modern' inter-state anarchy, or wrong about the dynamics of the modern inter-state system as well. *The Myth of 1648* focuses entirely on the first question, without specifying the stakes of inter-state rivalry in the era of world capitalism. This leads to an enormous lacuna at the end of the narrative: from the Victorian era it leaps to the 1990s, bypassing World Wars, Fascism, Communism, the Cold War and decolonization, as if these episodes of state formation did not complicate the relationship Teschke seeks to establish between modern geopolitics and the formation of the world-market. The gap between his account and the empirical record is mentioned in a single paragraph.

After confidently asserting that social-property relations generate geopolitical orders, he seems to acknowledge that the problem has not been solved and asks:

If capitalism and a system of states are not genetically co-constitutive and co-emergent, and if capitalism did not develop simultaneously in all early-modern states, what was the relation between capitalism and the inter-state system?

It is apparently hard to determine whether a plurality of sovereign states is a good or bad thing for capitalism as a system—assuming such a calculation could even be made. But the more intractable difficulty does not concern plurality, but antagonism. The conclusion to the millennial story Teschke tells strongly implies that the withdrawal of coercion from the internal sphere of economic relations resulted in the withering away of the apparatus of externally directed coercion—but this, of course, never happened. How then can the social-property relations of capitalism explain the persistence of war as a recognized means of settlement between states, long after it has ceased to be a systemic means of accumulation? Recognizing the problem

that his conception of capitalism raises, he hesitantly offers the long-term forecast that 'since capitalism is not predicated on the logic of domestic political accumulation, we should expect it to bring about the decline of external geo-political accumulation that defined the war-driven international conduct of the feudal and absolutist ages'.

But no account that raises such expectations without even addressing the historical record can be considered adequate. The actual pattern of regime change and reform that began in the nineteenth century in response to the discipline of various, increasingly capitalist markets, is better explained in terms of an adaptive process of the specialization of functions within the state apparatus. Although European parliaments in this age successfully redefined the mandate of government in matters of taxation, justice, infrastructure and education, this process of administrative reorganization did not result in the demise of geo-politics, but rather its formal rationalization. The diplomatic and military staffs of the *ancien régimes* became the modern bureaucratic elites of the classical bourgeois states of the long nineteenth century. According to Michael Mann, 'the foregoing also enabled war risks and means to be calculated more precisely, and the calculations could be inserted into a rational geo-political diplomacy.' He notes that, accordingly, 'this was the age of theorist-generals and diplomats'.

This observation raises a question which should have been at the centre of Teschke's theorization of the post-Westphalian situation: when do the costs and benefits of war make it a rational policy, for states refashioned under the economic discipline of capitalism? Put this way, it is obvious that any estimate must take into account exponential increases in the destructiveness of war, as this qualitatively changes the terms of the calculation. An adequate theorization of the history of inter-societal violence would address the evolution of force structures and weapon systems.

The formal rationalization of statecraft was a consequence of the bureaucratic specialization of state functions. The separation of the political from the economic was accompanied by a bifurcation of the strategic imperatives of foreign policy from the domestic imperatives of economic growth and social stability. Mann again provides a compelling explanation for this structural division between the rationality operative in these separate fields.

Diplomacy is far less regulated, routinized and predictable than are major domestic politics. Diplomacy involves a number of autonomous states among whom there are few normative ties, yet continuous recalculations of the main chance.

Is there a central *Staatsraison* that integrates these distinct imperatives? How, by whom, and against whom, is this integration achieved as a strategic project? Gramsci's scattered reflections on politics provide intriguing

sketches of the historical cases that could potentially answer such questions. The concept of hegemony he developed brought into focus a range of political practices conjoining the ongoing maintenance of domestic power positions to the improvisational pursuit of specific strategic aims in the geopolitical field. However incomplete, it at least provides a point of entry into areas that do not even register in Teschke's problematic.

Near the beginning of this work he acknowledges that an adequate international-relations theory would have to take into consideration the 'mentality and self-understandings of collective actors'—what he calls 'the culture of war—but the suggestion is never subsequently taken up. Bracketing this theoretical area, Teschke's study only addresses the abstract problem of capitalism's compatibility with the plurality of sovereign states, without any attempt to conceptualize the latter as a strategic field. But as long as war remains a possibility between the leading states of the world system, a theory of international relations has to be able to explain the specific rationality of this sphere, whose standards of success and failure stand in a loose, indeterminate relationship to the imperatives that determine the aggregate fortunes of a national economy in the world market. Realism is the spontaneous representation of this field from the perspective of the outwardly turned apparatus that embodies the entire state in its relations to other states. However fictional this representation, it is an objectively operative fiction.

The penultimate chapter suggests how capitalism might bring about, somewhat belatedly, the demise of Grand Strategy: 'It follows that the key idea of modern international relations is . . . the multilateral political management of global capital's crisis potential and the regulation of the world economy by the leading capitalist states.' Thus Teschke arrives at a conclusion reached by Karl Kautsky at the beginning of the First World War. It should be remembered that Lenin rejected Kautsky then not because he thought that this scenario was incompatible with the abstract social logic of capital. This was, he argued, beside the point. Even today, his pamphlet on imperialism reminds us that the massively uneven and violently cyclical pattern of capitalist economic development makes any future euthanasia of military-diplomatic statecraft highly unlikely. For Lenin the definitive separation of the political from the economic never takes place.

Where do we stand now 'in the flow of history'? Teschke's modernization narrative is an attempt to explain its 'direction and meaning'. He rejects what he takes to be the prevailing view outside of the Realist camp, that 'the modern, territorially bounded sovereign state, is being replaced by a post-territorial, postmodern global order', but only because he objects to the term 'postmodern'. After many centuries of transition, he announces that 'modern international relations may just have arrived'.

But none of the proposed inaugural moments of modernity turn out to be definitive, as the geo-political trend-line is periodically deflected from its anticipated course. After striking down the myth of 1648, Teschke pauses to reflect on the antinomies of periodization. It turns out that ‘no single event or date can be unequivocally singled out as the decisive system-wide caesura of inter-state modernity. There was no “structural rupture” that divided pre-modern from modern inter-state relations.’

The oscillations of this place-holder term ‘modernity’ at numerous points in the narrative seem to confirm the assessment of Fredric Jameson that ‘there is something fundamentally unrepresentable about such moments of radical structural change, of the break or transition, in the first place.’ Long downturns, competition for liquid capital, debt-driven expansion, one meltdown after another, looming fiscal insolvencies: what geo-political transformations will emerge out of this mounting global turbulence? Suddenly the direction is unclear. Taking stock of this situation requires dispensing with ‘modernity’—a narrative category that no longer comprehends the military, economic and cultural vectors of the latest phase of capitalism.

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'RETORT': Afflicted Powers

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PETER HALLWARD: Option Zero in Haiti

A very multilateral coup. Franco-American harmony and unanimous blessings from the Security Council for the overthrow of a constitutional government and crushing of popular hope, in the Western hemisphere's poorest nation-state.

EMILIE BICKERTON: The Camera Possessed

Extraordinary career of Jean Rouch—surrealist, engineer, anthropologist, cinéaste—synthesizing the gains of Vertov and Flaherty, to take his camera inside the taboo. In Abidjan and Paris, ethnographical films appropriated by their subjects as springboard for the New Wave.

STEFAN COLLINI: On Variousness; and on Persuasion

The resources culture may appropriately furnish for a critique of society, not always unpolitical, defended against Francis Mulhern's case in *Metaculture* and its sequels. Does criticism persuade by attraction of example, or by force of proposition?

BENEDICT ANDERSON: Nitroglycerine in the Pomegranate

Literary interactions between world capital and colonial periphery in the late nineteenth century—how rebel Filipino novelist José Rizal transformed elements of decadent aestheticism in Huysmans's *À Rebours*, to explosive political effect.

CHIN-TAO WU: Tokyo's High-Art Emporia

Why Japanese department-store owners turned their upper floors over to Vuillard, Degas and Kandinsky at the height of the bubble economy. Consumption of high art as packaging for the mass commodity.

BOOK REVIEWS

STEFAN JONSSON on Karl Corino, *Robert Musil: Eine Biographie*. Correspondences between *The Man Without Qualities* and the turbulent life and times of its creator, in a definitive new German biography.

TONY WOOD on Corinne Diserens, ed., *Gordon Matta-Clark*. Dissections of architectural space in the 60s and 70s, and their meaning in contemporary criticism. Did Matta-Clark's disappearing art works leave behind a radical grin?

KIM MOODY on Beverly Silver, *Forces of Labour*. Investigation of the historically shifting frontiers of working-class resistance, from 1870s Northern heartlands to the newly industrializing periphery of South Africa, Brazil and South Korea.

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AFFLICTED POWERS

The State, the Spectacle and September 11

He too fought under television for our place in the sun.

Robert Lowell on Lieutenant Calley, 1971

WE BEGIN FROM the moment in February 2003 when the tapestry copy of Picasso's *Guernica* hung in the ante-room to the UN Security Council Chamber was curtained over, at American insistence—not 'an appropriate backdrop', it was explained, for official statements to the world media on the forthcoming invasion of Iraq.¹ The episode became an emblem. Many a placard on Piccadilly or Market Street rang sardonic changes on Bush and the snorting bull. An emblem, yes—but, with the benefit of hindsight, emblematic of what? Of the state's relentless will to control the minutiae of appearance, as part of—essential to—its drive to war? Well, certainly. But in this case, did it get its way? Did not the boorishness of the effort at censorship prove counterproductive, eliciting the very haunting—by an imagery still capable of putting a face on the brutal abstraction of 'shock and awe'—that the velcro covering was meant to put a stop to? And did not the whole incident speak above all to the state's *anxiety* as it tried to micro-manage the means of symbolic production—as if it feared that every last detail of the derealized decor it had built for its citizens had the potential, at a time of crisis, to turn utterly against it?

These are the ambiguities, generalized to the whole conduct of war and politics over the past three years, that this essay will explore. We start from the premise that certain concepts and descriptions put forward forty years ago by Guy Debord and the Situationist International, as part of their effort to comprehend the new forms of state control and social

disintegration, still possess explanatory power—more so than ever, we suspect, in the poisonous epoch we are living through. In particular, the twinned notions of ‘the colonization of everyday life’ and ‘the society of the spectacle’—we think each concept needs the other if it is to do its proper work—strike us as having purchase on key aspects of what has happened since September 11, 2001. Our purpose, in a word, is to turn two central Situationist hypotheses back to the task for which they were always primarily intended—to make them instruments of political analysis again, directed to an understanding of the powers and vulnerabilities of the capitalist state. (We take it we are not alone in shuddering at the way ‘spectacle’ has taken its place in approved postmodern discourse over the past 15 years, as a vaguely millenarian accompaniment to ‘new media studies’ or to wishful thinking about freedom in cyberspace, with never a whisper that its original objects were the Watts Riots and the Proletarian Cultural Revolution.)

None of this means that we think we comprehend the whole shape and dynamic of the new state of affairs, or can offer a theory of its deepest determinations. We are not sectaries of the spectacle; no one concept, or cluster of concepts, seems to us to get the measure of the horror of the past three years. We even find it understandable, if in the end a mistake, that some on the Left have seen the recent wars in the desert and squabbles in the Security Council as open to analysis in classical Marxist terms, proudly unreconstructed—bringing on stage again the predictions and revulsions of Lenin’s and Hobson’s studies of imperialism—rather than in those of a new politics of ‘internal’, technologized social control.

The present dark circumstances call for fresh political thought. No attempt at such thinking can avoid three obvious, interlinked questions:

- To what extent did the events of September 11, 2001—the precision bombing of New York and Washington by organized enemies of the

¹ This is an extract from ‘Afflicted Powers’, a pamphlet amplifying the themes of the broadside ‘Neither Their War Nor Their Peace’, prepared for the San Francisco anti-war marches of February–March 2003. Other sections of the pamphlet, which will be published later this year, include ‘Islamism and the Crisis of the Secular Nation-State’, ‘Permanent War’, ‘Blood for Oil’, ‘Peace, Anti-Capitalism and the Multitude’ and ‘Opposition to Modernity’. RETORT is a gathering of council communists and affiliated nay-sayers, based for the past two decades in the San Francisco Bay Area. Involved in the writing of the present essay were Iain Boal, T. J. Clark, Joseph Matthews and Michael Watts.

us Empire—usher in a new era? Did those events change anything fundamental in the calculus and conduct of advanced capitalist states, or in the relation of such states to their civil societies? If so, how?

- ▶ Are we to understand the forms of assertion of American power since September 11—the naïve demonstration of military supremacy (largely to reassure the demonstrators that ‘something could still be done’ with the monstrous armoury at the state’s beck and call), the blundering attempts at recolonization under way in Afghanistan and Iraq, the threats and payoffs to client states in every corner of the globe, the glowering attack on civil liberties within the US itself—as a step backwards, *a historical regression*, in which the molecular, integral, invisible means of control which so many of us believed were indispensable to a truly ‘modern’ state-system have given way to a new/old era of gunboats and book-burning?
- ▶ Do the concepts ‘society of the spectacle’ and ‘colonization of everyday life’ help us to grasp the logic of the present age? Or has the level of social dispersal and mendaciousness to which those concepts once pointed also been overtaken—displaced, abruptly, at a special moment of urgency and arrogance—by cruder, older imperatives of statecraft?

None of these questions, to repeat, can be answered in isolation. No one level of analysis—‘economic’ or ‘political’, global or local, focusing on the means of either material or symbolic production—will do justice to the current strange mixture of chaos and grand design. But one major aspect of the story—the struggle for mastery in the realm of the image—has so far barely been thought of as *positively interacting* with others more familiar and ‘material’. It is the first outline of this interaction that we aim to offer, for further debate.

II

The version of ‘spectacle’ with which we operate is minimal, pragmatic, matter of fact. No doubt the idea’s original author often gave it an exultant, world-historical force. But his tone is inimitable, as all efforts to duplicate it have proved; and in any case we are convinced that the age demands a different cadence—something closer (if we are lucky) to that

² of the lines from *Paradise Lost* we use as our pamphlet's epigraph² than to anything from Lukács or Ducasse.

The notion ‘spectacle’ was intended, then, as a first stab at characterizing a new form of, or stage in, the accumulation of capital. What it named preeminently was the submission of more and more facets of human sociability—areas of everyday life, forms of recreation, patterns of speech, idioms of local solidarity, kinds of ethical or aesthetic insubordination, the endless capacities of human beings to evade or refuse the orders brought down to them from on high—to the deadly solicitations (the lifeless bright sameness) of the market. Those who developed the analysis in the first place resisted the idea that this colonization of everyday life was dependent on any one set of technologies, but notoriously they were interested in the means modern societies have at their disposal to systematize and disseminate *appearances*, and to subject the texture of day-to-day living to a constant barrage of images, instructions, slogans, logos, false promises, virtual realities, miniature happiness-motifs. Batteries Not Included, as the old punk band had it.

The choice of the word ‘colonization’ to describe the process was deliberate. It invited readers to conceive of the invasion and sterilizing of so many unoccupied areas of human species-being—areas that previous regimes, however overweening, had chosen (or been obliged) to leave alone—as a specific necessity of capitalist production, just as much part of its dynamism as expansion to the ends of the earth. The colonization of everyday life, we might put it from our present vantage point, was ‘globalization’ turned inward—mapping and enclosing the hinterland of the social, and carving out from the detail of human inventiveness an ever more ramified and standardized market of exchangeable subjectivities. Naturally the one colonization implied the other: there would have been no Black Atlantic of sugars, alcohols and opiates without the drive to shape subjectivity into a pattern of small (saleable) addictions.

The point of the analysis, again, was to bring into focus the terms and possibilities of resistance (wars of liberation) against the colonizing

2 And reassembling our afflicted Powers,
Consult how we may henceforth most offend
Our Enemy, our own loss how repair,
How overcome this dire Calamity,
What reinforcement we may gain from Hope,
If not what resolution from desp're.—*Paradise Lost*, Book 1

forces; this in a situation, the later 1960s, where it was not foolhardy, even if ultimately mistaken, to imagine ‘reassembling our afflicted Powers’ and doing real harm to the enemy. Debord, to speak of him directly, was concerned most of all with the way the subjection of social life to the rule of appearances had led, in turn, to a distinct form of politics—of state formation and surveillance. His opinion on these matters fluctuated: they were the aspect of the present he most loathed, and which regularly elicited his best tirades and worst paranoia. We extract the following propositions from his pages.

First, that slowly but surely the state in the twentieth century had been dragged into full collaboration in the micro-management of everyday life. The market’s necessity became the state’s obsession. (Slowly, and in a sense against the state’s better judgement, because always there existed a tension between the modern state’s armoured other-directedness—its *raison d’être* as a war machine—and capital’s insistence that the state come to its aid in the great work of internal policing and packaging. This tension has again been visible over the past three years. We believe it is one key to the obvious incoherence of the state’s recent actions.) Second, this deeper and deeper involvement of the state in the day-to-day instrumentation of consumer obedience meant that increasingly it came to live or die by its investment in, and control of, the field of images—the alternative world conjured up by the new battery of ‘perpetual emotion machines’³ of which tv was the dim pioneer and which now beckons the citizen every waking minute. This world of images had long been a structural necessity of a capitalism oriented toward the overproduction of commodities, and therefore the constant manufacture of desire for them; but by the late twentieth century it had given rise to a specific polity.

The modern state, we would argue, has come to need weak citizenship. It depends more and more on maintaining an impoverished and hygienized public realm, in which only the ghosts of an older, more idiosyncratic civil society live on. It has adjusted profoundly to its economic master’s requirement for a thinned, unobstructed social texture, made up of loosely attached consumer subjects, each locked in its plastic work-station and nuclearized family of four. Weak citizenship, but for that very reason the object of the state’s constant, anxious attention—an unstoppable barrage of idiot fashions and panics and image-motifs, all

³ Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, London 1998, p. 89.

aimed at sewing the citizen back (unobtrusively, 'individually') into a deadly simulacrum of community.

At times, the first writers to confront this nightmare seemed to despair in the face of it:

There is no place left where people can discuss the realities which concern them, because they can never lastingly free themselves from the crushing presence of media discourse and of the various forces organized to relay it . . . Unanswerable lies have succeeded in eliminating public opinion, which first lost the ability to make itself heard and then very quickly dissolved altogether . . Once one controls the mechanism which operates the only form of social verification to be fully and universally recognized, one can say what one likes . . Spectacular power can similarly deny whatever it wishes to, once, or three times over, and change the subject: knowing full well there is no danger of riposte, in its own space or any other.⁴

Too many times over the past twelve months these sentences, in their anger and sorrow at the present form of politics, have echoed in our minds. But ultimately we dissent from their totalizing closure. Living after September 11, we are no longer so sure—and do not believe that spectacular power is sure—that 'there is no danger of riposte, in its own space or any other'. For better or worse, the precision bombings were such a riposte. And their effect on the spectacular state has been profound: the state's reply to them, we are certain, has exceeded in its crassness and futility the martyr-pilots' wildest dreams. Therefore we turn to another sentence from the same book, which (characteristically) acts as finale to the previous admissions of defeat. 'To this list of the triumphs of power we should add, however, one result which has proved negative: once the running of the state involves a permanent and massive shortage of historical knowledge, that state can no longer be led *strategically*'.⁵ Issued by a devotee of Sun Tzu and Clausewitz, this last verdict is crushing.

Debord had a robust and straightforward view of the necessity, for individuals and collectives, of learning from the past (not the least of the ways in which his thinking is classical, as opposed to postmodern). Of course he knew that the past is a 'construction'; but of obdurate and three-dimensional materials, he believed, constantly resisting any one frame, and which only the most elaborate machinery of forgetting could make fully tractable to power. His deepest fears as a revolutionary derived from

⁴ Guy Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* [1988], trans. Malcolm Imrie, London 1998, pp. 13–19 (order of sentences altered).

⁵ *Comments*, p. 20.

the sense, which grew upon him, that this elaborate machinery might now have been built, and really be turning the world into an eternal present. That was the key to his hatred of the image-life: that what it threatened, ultimately, was the very existence of the complex, created, two-way temporality that for him constituted the essence of the human.

Such was the nightmare. But even Debord sometimes took (cold) comfort from the recognition that the state too lived the nightmare, and would suffer the consequences. For it too could no longer learn from the past: it had progressively dismantled the contexts in which truly strategic discussion of its aims and interests—thinking in the long term, admitting the paradoxes and uncertainties of power, recognizing, in a word, ‘the cunning of reason’—might still be possible. The state was entrapped in its own apparatus of clichés. It had come almost to *believe* in the policy-motifs its think-tanks and disinformation consultancies churned out for it. How Debord would have revelled, over the past year, in the endless *double entendres* provided by the media, to the effect that Bush and Blair’s rush to war in Iraq should be blamed on ‘faulty intelligence’!

III

What, then, politically and strategically, took place on September 11, 2001? And how, politically and strategically, has the US state responded to it? Of course, we realize the dangers here. Why should we follow the lead of the spectacle itself in electing this one among many atrocities—raised to the new power of ideology, inevitably, by the idiot device of digitalizing its dateline—as a world-historical turning point? How much of the real dynamic (and pathology) of American power is conjured away by pinning it thus to a single image-event—in much the same way that American victory in the Cold War was rendered in retrospect magical, unanalysable, by the mantra ‘The Fall of the Wall’? There have been moments when we found it easy to sympathize with those of our comrades who, partly in reaction to the flood of cloying, pseudo-apocalyptic verbiage released by September 11 (which shows no sign of abating), go so far as to dismiss the bombings as so many pinpricks, *attentats*, hopeless symbolic gestures on the part of those with no real power to wound.

‘Hopeless symbolic gestures.’ We agree quite strictly with all three words of the diagnosis. (As do the perpetrators, it seems. In them chiliasm is

spliced with nihilism, to form a distinctively hyper-modern compound. When they boast in their communiqués of being ‘for Death’—in contradistinction, they imply, to modernity’s miserable attachment to a Life not worth the name—one is never sure if one is hearing Tyndale’s cry from the stake or Stavrogin’s in the last pages of *The Possessed*. As so often lately, the twenty-first century seems an amalgam of the sixteenth and nineteenth.) And the question remains: what is the effectiveness—the specific political force—of this form of symbolic action, hopeless or not, within the symbolic economy called ‘spectacle’? *Spectacularly*, the American state suffered a defeat on September 11. And spectacularly, for this state, does not mean superficially or epiphenomenally. The state was wounded in September in its heart of hearts, and we see it still, three years later, flailing blindly in the face of an image it cannot exorcize, and trying desperately to convert the defeat back into terms it can respond to.

One last caveat. It should hardly be necessary to state that, if we refuse to extract the September bombings from the cycle of horrors over which the US has presided since 1945, and believe it necessary, if we are to understand them politically, to treat the events of September as an occurrence in a war of images, it is not because we fail to recognize (and wish we could find words for) the obscenity of those events. On the contrary, precisely because the attacks in September were calibrated to leave an indelible image-trail behind them, they have seared in the memory item after item of evidence of just what it is, in terms of human fear and agony, that political calculus so habitually writes off. We too are haunted by the flailing arms of the jumpers, and the scream on the soundtrack as the tower stutters into dust; just as we are haunted by the image of Hanadi Jaradat’s bloody head, ‘her thick hair tied in a ponytail’, dumped by the clean-up squad on a table at the back of the restaurant in Haifa she had blown to pieces an hour before.⁶ We wish we had words for these things. We wish we lived in a political culture where the language of revulsion had not been debauched by decade after decade of selective gravitas. (Your Chechnya for my Guatemala. Your Suharto for my Pol Pot.)

We proceed then, unwillingly, from the image on the screen. It matters profoundly that the horrors of September 11 were designed above all to be visible, and that this visibility marked the bombings off from most previous campaigns of air terror, especially those sponsored by states.

⁶ *New York Times*, 5 October 2003.

There were no cameras at Dresden, Hamburg, Hiroshima.⁷ The horror there had to be unseen; it had to act—was meant to act—on the surrounding population in the form of uncontrollable hearsay and panic; and it was to be presented to the enemy state apparatus in the form of report, statistic, prediction, ultimatum.

September's terror was different. It made no demands, it offered no explanations. It was premised on the belief (learned from the culture it tried to annihilate) that a picture is worth a thousand words—that a picture, in the present condition of politics, is itself, if sufficiently well-executed, a specific and effective piece of statecraft. Of course the martyr-pilots knew that bringing down the Twin Towers would do nothing, or next to nothing, to stop the actual circuits of capital. But circuits of capital are bound up, in the longer term, with circuits of sociability—patterns of belief and desire, levels of confidence, degrees of identification with the good life of the commodity. And these, said the terrorists, thinking strategically, are aspects of the social imaginary still (always, interminably) being put together by the perpetual emotion machines. Supposing those machines could be captured for a moment, and on them appeared the perfect image of capitalism's negation. Would that not be enough? Enough truly to destabilize the state and society, and produce a sequence of vaunted and paranoias whose long-term political consequences for the capitalist world order would, at the very least, be unpredictable?

Or perhaps *entirely* predictable, from a geopolitical standpoint. 'You know our demands', said the martyr-pilots (strictly to themselves). 'And we know you cannot accede to them. We know what you will do instead. We are certain your answer will be military. We anticipate your idiot leader blurting out the word crusade. What you will do will vindicate our analysis point by point, humiliation by humiliation, and confirm the world of Islamism in its despairing strength. And you will do it because there is no answer to our image-victory, yet you (because humiliation is something in which you have no schooling) have to pretend there is one.'

⁷ It was not until a year after Hiroshima, in July 1946, that the twin signs of post-war modernity—the mushroom cloud and the two-piece bathing suit—were given form in and around the Bikini 'tests'. 'Eighteen tons of cinematography equipment and more than half of the world's supply of motion picture film were on hand to record the Able and Baker detonations', Jack Niedenthal, *For the Good of Mankind. A History of the People of Bikini and their Islands*, Majuro, MH 2001, p. 3. Interested readers may also wish to consult Michael Light, *100 Suns*, New York 2003.

The terrorists (to put it only slightly differently) followed the logic of the spectacle to its charnel house conclusion. If, to trot out Debord's over-famous aphorism again, 'the spectacle is capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image',⁸ then what more adequate encapsulation of the process could there be but the World Trade Centre (with its multiplication of the terminally gigantic by two)? And what other means of defeating it—its social instrumentality, that is, its power over the consuming imagination—than have it be literally obliterated on camera?

We are rehearsing a logic, not endorsing it. But we believe that only by recognizing what was truly 'modern' in the martyr-pilots' strategy—truly the opposite of a desperate, powerless, atavistic pinprick; truly the *instigator* of the state's present agony—will the Left be able to move toward argument with the new terrorism's premises and upshots, something it has not yet begun to do. At the level of the image (here is premise number one) the state is vulnerable; and that level is now fully part of, necessary to, the state's apparatus of self-reproduction. Terror can take over the image-machinery for a moment—and a moment, in the timeless echo-chamber of the spectacle, may now eternally be all there is—and use it to amplify, reiterate, accumulate the sheer visible happening of defeat. It is a confirmation of the terrorists' hopes that after the first days, in the US, the fall of the Towers became exactly the image that *had not to be shown*.⁹ The taboo only made the after-image more palpable and effective. Everything in the culture went on, and still goes on, in relation to that past image-event; nothing in the culture can address the event directly. The silence of so-called 'popular culture' in the face of September 11 has been deafening. (It is as if the commercial music of America in the mid-twentieth century had had nothing to say about war, or race, or the Depression, or the new world of goods and appliances. It had plenty—partly because the adjective 'popular' still pointed to something real about its audiences and raw materials. That was long ago, of course: the present total obedience of the culture industry to the protocols of the war on terror—its immediate ingestion and reproduction of the state's interdicts and paranoias—is proof positive, if any were needed, of the snuffing out of the last traces of insubordination in the studios of TimeWarner.)

⁸ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* [1967], trans Donald Nicholson-Smith, New York 1994, p. 24.

⁹ A Bush campaign commercial in March 2004 broke the rule of invisibility, and was taken off the air (with grovelling apologies) in a matter of hours.



The logic of the pilots was part fantasy, we would argue, part (proven) lucidity. We could reply to it by saying that the new terrorists succumbed to the temptation of the spectacle, rather than devising a way to outflank or contest it. They were exponents of the idea (brilliant exponents, but this only reveals the idea's fundamental heartlessness) that control over the image is now the key to social power. And that image-power, like all other forms of ownership and ascendancy under capitalism, has been subject to an ineluctable process of concentration, so that it is now manifest in certain identifiable (targetable) places, monuments, pseudo-bodies, icons, logos, manufactured non-events; signs that in their very emptiness and worthlessness (the Twin Towers as architecture were perfect examples) rule the imaginary earth; and whose concentrated, materialized nullity gives terror a new chance—to frighten, demoralize, turn the world upside down.

Once upon a time (and still, as we write) bombers went out into the city with their sensible holdalls, or their windbreakers a little more tightly zipped than usual. Once upon a time the shrapnel sliced through livers and skulls in neighbourhood restaurants, street markets, dance

halls, breeding the contagion of rumour in the narrow streets, sapping the will of a class or colonial enemy, driving its cadres back into the isolation—the demoralization—of ‘home’; eroding, that is, the patterns of sociability (patterns of fear and enforcement, yes, but embedded in a wider and deeper universe of loyalties) that had held a regime together.

Now a new breed of bomber has understood that in the society they are attacking such networks of sociability are secondary: not absent, not irrelevant, but increasingly supplanted by a ghost sociability which does not need its citizens to leave home for its key rituals and allegiances to reproduce themselves. The terror of September 11 had a handful of targets (our tendency to make it, in memory, simply ‘the bombing of the Twin Towers’ is not untrue to the logic of the event). The perpetrators knew full well that they lacked the means to spread out through the wider social fabric and bring ordinary doings to a halt. And they believed, rightly or wrongly, that in present circumstances they did not need to. What they did was designed to hold us indoors, to make us turn back and back to a moving image of capitalism screaming and exploding, to make us go on listening (in spite of ourselves) to the odious talking heads trying to put something, anything, in place of the desolation.

IV

More than one commentator since September 11, particularly over the last year, has tried to make sense of the special desperation of the state’s conduct in the aftermath. David Runciman has gone so far as to argue that what is happening amounts to a genuine mutation of the international state-system:

Suddenly, the Hobbesian view that states and states alone have the power and security to operate under conditions of lawfulness is threatened by the knowledge that even the most powerful states are vulnerable to assault from unknown and unpredictable sources. It can now be said that in the international arena ‘the weakest has the strength to kill the strongest’, or they would do, if only they could get their hands on the necessary equipment. This, potentially, changes everything ..

The common view that 11 September 2001 marked the return to a Hobbesian world is therefore entirely wrong. It marked the beginning of a post-Hobbesian age, in which a new kind of insecurity threatens the familiar structures of modern political life. In one sense, of course, this insecurity is not new, because it carries echoes of the natural uncertainties

of individual human beings. But it is new for states, which were meant to be invulnerable to such paranoid anxieties. And since they are not designed to deal with this sort of threat, even the most powerful states don't know what to do about it.¹⁰

This strikes us as capturing something real. There are several things to be said in response. First, Runciman's argument starts, very reasonably, from the idea that the state's new level of fearfulness is derived from the possible or actual availability of 'weapons of mass destruction' to groups sheltering under the wing of regimes hostile to the new world order, or rich and skilful enough to bargain with such regimes for a share in their military technology. (The fact that such technology was usually, in the first place, eagerly provided by the states now quaking in their boots at the thought of its going astray—that fact ought to be entered into the reckoning, no doubt, if it can be done without too much repetitive 'I told you so.') It is a slight embarrassment to Runciman that the attack which precipitated the change in the order of state relations used weapons that had nothing to do with the disintegrating international arms market. Nothing could be more foolish than to leap on his analysis at this point, brandishing some tinpot argument to the effect that from now on the real weapons of mass destruction are the media, that the war is a war of simulacra not bullets—that 'the Fall of the Twin Towers Did Not Take Place'. But we would argue that the present condition of politics does not make sense unless it is approached from a dual perspective—seen as a struggle for crude, material dominance, but also (threaded ever closer into that struggle) as a battle for the control of appearances.

We agree with Runciman (against many on the Left who would prefer Al Qaida to be a last-gasp, exotic, pathetic, pre-capitalist phenomenon) that the September bombings are a distinctively modern symptom. What they point to, far beyond the specific atrocity and its grisly religious fuel, is a new structural feature of the international state system: that the historical monopoly of the means of destruction by the state is now at risk. This new feature has many causes. Technological advance is one of them. The rise of a worldwide secondary market in arms—partly the result of the chaos attending the end of the Cold War, partly a natural product of the neoliberal commodification of the globe—is another. Likewise the contracting-out of an increasing number of military services to a shady

¹⁰ David Runciman, 'A Bear Armed with a Gun', *London Review of Books*, 3 April 2003, p. 5.

corporate world, again something that neoliberalism began by warmly recommending to its client nations. The permeability of borders obviously matters, and has become another major item in the new paranoia. But that fact is linked to a deeper and more pervasive reality, which again is a product of the ‘globalization’ to which these same states are committed—and on which their bloated home economies depend. *Failed states* is the term of art for this endemic reality from which the personnel and ideology of September 11 so unmistakably arose.

‘Failed states’, ‘rogue states’, ‘weak states’, ‘societies left behind by modernization’—the diagnoses are legion, and the facts they point to complex.¹¹ Here, with the problem of September specifically our object, we will simply assert that ‘failed states’ have become a structural element of the international system—a product, a necessity, of the new universe of globalization. There is no ontological distinction between the successfully weakened and permeable states, on which the world order now thrives, and those whose weakness has become chronic fatigue and disintegration, and whose embrace of foreign capital has widened just enough to include independent arms dealers, war lords and drug cartels.

Weak citizenship, then, at the spectacular centre; and *weak states* in the ‘world economy’ which the centre works endlessly to exploit. A weak state is one whose local defences against imperial control have (through the implanting of ‘bases’, the rifling of natural resources, the helping hand to local elites in the event of indigenous revolt, and neoliberal penetration by the corporations) all been satisfactorily dismantled. A failed state is one where the logic of abjection has been carried, often imperceptibly, too far—so that suddenly the ‘flourishing’ economy shatters, the bribes no longer produce the shoddy goods, the death rates climb, the effigies of Uncle Sam are paraded through the streets, and up in the mountains or the university dormitories young men and women cover their heads and study *The Art of War*. We could say with only the slightest edge of exaggeration that failed states are the typical—determinant—political entities of the world left behind by Cold War and ‘crash programmes’ and the attentions of the IMF.

The events of September, it is common knowledge, were directly the creature of this world of despair. They were trained for in Jalalabad, paid

¹¹ Other sections of ‘Afflicted Powers’, which address oil, privatization, nationalisms, the Balkans, Israel and Palestine, will have more to say on these questions.

for in Riyadh. But this does not conflict with the perspective—that of spectacle—from which this essay began. One of the key phenomena of the ‘failed-state’ reality we have been describing is the power of Al Jazeera. (The us has learned that, much to its chagrin.) Nothing enrages the young Arab intellectual so much as the sight of people his own age, surrounded by an urban fabric arrested midway on the path to post-modern squalor, clutching their cell phones and telling their video worry beads. One of the formative moments in the education of Mohammed Atta, we are informed, was when he came to realize that the ‘conservation’ of Islamic Cairo, in which he had hoped to participate as a newly trained town planner, was to obey the logic of Disney World.

Weak states or failed states are a hideous amalgam of the feudal, the Nasserite ‘national’ *and* the spectacular—that is the point. Intellectuals brought up in such circles of hell need no lessons from postmodern theory about where power lies in the chaos around them, and what means might be available to contest it. They draw conclusions—cruel and mistaken ones, in our view, but emerging from a treadmill of pain and hopelessness at which we can only dimly guess—and choose their weapons.

V

We return to the pivotal sentence from Debord. ‘To this list of the triumphs of power we should add one result which has proved negative: once the running of the state involves a permanent and massive shortage of historical knowledge, that state can no longer be led *strategically*.’ This should be unpacked in various ways. First, there is what we might call the Kissinger problem—the problem of weak citizenship in relation to the actual, brutal needs of empire. (This is understandably an obsession of the old Peace Prizeman. He for one has never recovered from the Vietnam syndrome.) A tension exists—let us put it mildly—between the dispersal and vacuity of the public sphere, which is necessary to the maintenance of ‘consumer society’, and those stronger allegiances and identifications which the state must call on, repeatedly, if it is to maintain the dependencies that feed the consumer beast. Weak citizens grow too soon tired of wars and occupations. To this long-term dilemma is now added another. A state that lives more and more in and through a regime of the image does not know what to do when, for a moment, it dies by the same lights. It does not matter that ‘economically’

or ‘geopolitically’ the death may be an illusion. Spectacularly it was real. And image-death—image-defeat—is not a condition this state can endure. ‘There now exists a threat,’ to quote Runciman again, ‘which makes some states feel more vulnerable than their subjects.’

We would put it differently. Of course, as materialists, *we do not believe that one can destroy the society of the spectacle by producing the spectacle of its destruction*. This is the nub of our tactical dissent from September 11, leaving aside our strategic rejection of terror as a political means.¹² But the present state does not share our scepticism, it seems. It feels the cold hand of the image-event at its throat. It lives and relives the moment that its machines always had lying in wait for it—the violent rendezvous of speed with enormity, the non-human of technology meeting the non-human of accumulation. As if Cheops himself had looked on while the Great Pyramid was split in two by a bolt from the sun. Just in time for *Good Morning America*.

The spectacular state is obliged, we are saying, to devise an *answer* to the defeat of September 11. And it seems it cannot. Of course many of the things it has tried out over the past three years have ordinary military, neo-colonial, grossly economic logics underlying them. The invasion of Iraq is the obvious case in point. We too take seriously the idea that factions within the US administration had long thought the impasse of ‘sanctions’ intolerable, had thirsted for oil, had dreamt of a new bridge-head in an increasingly anti-American region, and so on. But at the very least it can be said that the manner in which these policies were finally acted on—they had been the pipedreams of the ultra-Right in Washington for more than a decade—has been a barely credible mixture

¹² We realize that a great deal now turns, for Left politics, on the possibility of offering a definition of ‘terror’ having nothing in common with that of Blair and Bomber Harris, and a rejection of it similarly cleansed of sanctimony. This is too big a topic to enter into here. We might indicate the general lines of our approach by saying that for us, the question of Terror is always capitalized, and returns us to the politics of 1793. Terror as a political instrument, in other words, is the property of the state (maybe the founding property of the state in its ‘modern’ manifestation), or of those thinking like a state. Its purest exponents are the Churchills of the world. ‘I do not understand this squeamishness about the use of gas . . . I am strongly in favour of using poisoned gas against uncivilized tribes [to] spread a lively terror’. Churchill in 1920, as Secretary of State at the War Office, justifying his authorization of RAF Middle East Command to use chemical weapons ‘against recalcitrant Arabs’, quoted in Geoff Simons, *Iraq: From Sumer to Saddam*, New York 1994, p. xiv.

of blunder, gullibility, over-reach, lip-smacking callousness (hardly bothering to disguise its lack of concern at the ‘stuff happening’ in the streets of Kandahar or Baghdad), unfathomable ignorance and wishful thinking, and constant entrapment in the day-to-day, hour-by-hour temporality of the sound bite and the suicide bomb. And where, in the end, is the image the war machine has been looking for—the one to put paid to the September haunting? Toppling statues, Presidents in flight jackets, Saddam saying ‘Aah’, embedded toadies stroking the barrels of guns . . . wake us (wake the whole world of couch potatoes) when it’s over.

The state has behaved like a maddened beast. This does not mean it is on the path to real strategic failure, necessarily, or that it will prove incapable of pulling back from the imperatives of the image-war and slowly, relentlessly accommodating itself to the needs of a new round of primitive accumulation. The hatchet men and torture brigades are being recruited again as we write. ‘Road maps’ are to be thrown in the dust-bin. Failed states become weak states once more. ‘Democracy’ proves unexportable. Iran and Syria join the comity of nations. Exit Wolfowitz and Makiya, mumbling.

States can behave like maddened beasts, in other words, and still get their way. They regularly do. But the present madness is singular: the dimension of spectacle has never before interfered so palpably, so insistently, with the business of keeping one’s satrapies in order. And never before have spectacular politics been conducted in the shadow—the ‘historical knowledge’—of *defeat*. It remains to be seen what new mutation of the military-industrial-entertainment complex emerges from the shambles.

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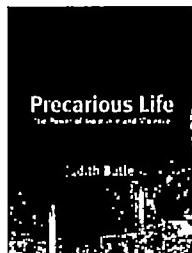
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OPTION ZERO IN HAITI

AS HIS ADVISORS ponder the ever more troubling consequences of regime change in Iraq, Bush is entitled to take some comfort from the far more successful operation just completed in Haiti.¹ No brusque pre-emptive strikes, domestic carping or splintering coalitions have marred the scene; objections from CARICOM and the African Union have carried no threats of reprisal. In overthrowing the constitutionally elected government of Jean Bertrand Aristide, Washington could hardly have provided a more exemplary show of multilateral courtesy. Allies were consulted, the UN Security Council's blessing sought and immediately received. The signal sent to Chávez, Castro and other hemispheric opponents was unambiguous—yet it was not a bullying Uncle Sam but France that made the first call for international intervention in Haiti's domestic affairs.

In Paris, too, there was much satisfaction at the sophisticated fit between the humanitarian duty of a civilized nation and the need (without losing face) to placate Washington for last year's disobedience over Iraq. The US might well fear this 'Liberia at their gates', as Villepin's Independent Commission report put it—but, wary of domestic reaction among their own black population in an election year, hesitate to act.² The Quai d'Orsay's offer of diplomatic protection would guarantee not only safe entry but painless withdrawal, as the proposed UN Stabilization Force, took up the burden three months later.³ London would be suavely usurped of its chief attack-dog role. Chirac and Villepin had the virtually unanimous backing of the French media, from *Le Figaro* to *Le Monde* and *L'Humanité*, for military intervention in Haiti. Among the most feverish voices has been that of *Libération*, which held President Aristide—a 'defrocked priest turned tyrant millionaire', 'the Père Ubu of the Caribbean'—personally responsible for the 'risk of humanitarian catastrophe' that was claimed to justify the invasion.⁴

On 25 February Villepin issued a formal call for Aristide's resignation. Two days later, France, the US and Canada announced the dispatch of troops to Port-au-Prince. In the early hours of Sunday, February 29 the Haitian president was flown out of his country at gunpoint. Later that same day the UN Security Council suspended its normal 24-hour pre-vote consultation period to push through an emergency resolution mandating the US Marines, French Foreign Legion and Canadian forces already converging on the Haitian capital as the advance guard of a multinational UN force. In the face of such international backing, the Congressional Black Caucus confined itself to mild rebuke. *Libération* gloated at the dissolution of 'the pathetic carnival over which Aristide had proclaimed himself king'. For the *New York Times* the invasion was a fine example of how allies can 'find common ground and play to their strengths'. All that remained was for Bush to call and thank Chirac, expressing his delight at 'the excellent French-American cooperation'.⁵

The Western media had prepared the way for another 'humanitarian intervention' according to the now familiar formula. Confronted by repeated allegations of corruption, patronage, drugs, human rights abuses, autocracy, etc., the casual consumer of mainstream commentary was encouraged to believe that what was at stake had nothing to do with a protracted battle between the poor majority and a tiny elite but was instead just a convoluted free-for-all in which each side was equally at fault. The French press in particular tended to paint a lurid portrait of 'African' levels of squalor and superstition, to serve both as a warning to France's remaining dependencies in the Caribbean and as a challenge that might test, once again, the 'civilizing mission' of the international community. As a former colonizer and slave power, France would be wrong to 'turn its back', argued the chief reporter of Villepin's investigative commission on Franco-Haitian relations. The 2004 bicentenary of Haitian independence offered the chance for a mature coming to terms

¹ I am very grateful to Paul Farmer, Brian Concannon, Randall White, Charles Arthur, Dominique Esser, Richard Watts and Cécile Winter for their help with various aspects of this article.

² Régis Debray, *Rapport du comité indépendant de réflexion et de propositions sur les relations franco-haïtiennes*, January 2004, pp. 5, 53.

³ UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on Haiti*, 16 April 2004.

⁴ See Patrick Sabatier, *Libération*, 31 December 2003 and 24 February 2004.

⁵ *Financial Times*, 2 March 2004; *International Herald Tribune*, 4 March 2004; Sabatier, *Libération*, 1 March 2004; Elaine Sciolino, *New York Times*, 3 March 2004.

with the past, through which France might ‘shed the weight which servitude imposes on the masters’, and negotiate a new relationship.⁶

Rather than a *political* struggle, rather than a battle of principles and priorities, the fight for Haiti became just another instance of the petty corruption and mass victimization that is supposed to characterize public life beyond the heavily guarded gates of Western democracy. Rather than conditioned by radical class polarization or the mechanics of systematic exploitation, the overthrow of Aristide has most often figured as yet another demonstration of perhaps the most consistent theme of Western commentary on the island: that poor black people remain incapable of governing themselves.

Breaking the chain

The structural basis of Haiti’s crippling poverty is a direct legacy of slavery and its aftermath. The 1697 Treaty of Ryswick had formalized French occupation of the western third of the Spanish possession, the island of Hispaniola, under the name of Saint-Domingue. Over the following century, the colony grew to be the most profitable in the world; by the 1780s, it was a bigger source of income for its masters than the whole of Britain’s thirteen North American colonies combined. No single source of revenue made so large a contribution to the growing prosperity of the French commercial bourgeoisie, and to the wealth of cities like Bordeaux, Nantes and Marseille. The slaves who produced these profits rose up in revolt in 1791. Combined British, Spanish and French efforts to crush the rebellion fuelled a war that lasted thirteen years and ended in unequivocal imperial defeat. Both Pitt and Napoleon lost some 50,000 troops in the effort to restore slavery and the status quo.

By late 1803, to the universal astonishment of contemporary observers, the armies led by Toussaint L’Ouverture and Dessalines had broken the chain of colonial slavery at ‘what had been, in 1789, its strongest link’.⁷ Renamed Haiti, the new country celebrated its independence in January 1804. I have argued elsewhere that there have been few other events in modern history whose implications were more threatening to the dominant order: the mere existence of an independent Haiti was a reproach to the slave-trading nations of Europe, a dangerous example to the slave-owning

⁶ Debray, *Rapport*, pp. 6, 9.

⁷ Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, London 1989, p. 258.

us, and an inspiration for successive African and Latin American liberation movements.⁸ Much of Haiti's subsequent history has been shaped by efforts, both internal and external, to stifle the consequences of this event and to preserve the essential legacy of slavery and colonialism—that spectacularly unjust distribution of labour, wealth and power which has characterized the whole of the island's post-Columbian history.

The main priority of the slaves who won their independence in 1804 was to block a return to the plantation economy by retaining some direct control over their own livelihood and land. Unlike most other Latin American and Caribbean countries, the development of export-oriented latifundia was limited by the widespread survival of small peasant proprietorship, and today 93 per cent of Haitian peasants still have at least some access to their own land.⁹ The reduction in size of an average farm to just two acres, however, combined with falling agricultural prices, drastic soil erosion and a chronic lack of investment, ensures that most of these peasants retain their independence at the cost of an effectively permanent destitution.

Extension of this destitution to the country as a whole was guaranteed by the isolation of its ruined economy in the decades following independence. Restoration France only re-established the trade and diplomatic relations essential to the new country's survival after Haiti agreed, in 1825, to pay its old colonial master a 'compensation' of some 150 million francs for the loss of its slaves—an amount roughly equal to the French annual budget at the time, or around ten years' worth of total revenue in Haiti—and to grant punishing commercial discounts. With its economy still shattered by the colonial wars, Haiti could only begin paying this debt by borrowing, at extortionate rates of interest, 24 million francs from private French banks. Though the French demand was eventually cut from 150 to 90 million francs, by the end of the nineteenth century Haiti's payments to France consumed around 80 per cent of the national budget; France received the last instalment in 1947. Haitians have thus had to pay their original oppressors three times over—through the slaves' initial labour, through compensation for the French loss of this labour, and then in interest on the payment of this compensation. No other single factor played so important a role in establishing Haiti as a

⁸ Hallward, 'Haitian Inspiration: Notes on the bicentenary of Haiti's independence', *Radical Philosophy* 123, Jan–Feb 2004.

⁹ Carolyn Fick, *The Making of Haiti: the Saint Domingue revolution from below*, Knoxville 1990, p. 249; World Bank, *Haiti: The Challenges of Poverty Reduction*, August 1998, p. 4.

systematically indebted country, the condition which in turn ‘justified’ a long and debilitating series of appropriations-by-gunboat.

The most consequential of these foreign interventions was launched by Woodrow Wilson in 1915, a counterpart to his punitive assaults on the Mexican Revolution. The US occupation lasted for nearly twenty years, and extended between 1916 and 1924 into a parallel incursion into the Dominican Republic next door. The American military regime proceeded to institute an early version of a structural adjustment programme: they abolished the clause in the constitution that had barred foreigners from owning property in Haiti, took over the National Bank, reorganized the economy to ensure more ‘reliable’ payments of foreign debt, expropriated land to create their own plantations, and trained a brutal military force whose only victories would be against the Haitian people. Rebellions—that of Charlemagne Peralte in the north during the early years of the occupation, or the strike wave of 1929—were savagely repressed. By the time they pulled out in 1934, US troops had broken the back of the initial peasant resistance to this socio-economic engineering, killing between 5,000 and 15,000 people in the process.

The army the US had constructed became the dominant power after the Marines departed, keeping both the population and politicians in check—the generals often taking turns as president themselves. It was as a counter to this force that the bespectacled ex-doctor François Duvalier organized his own murderous militia, the Tonton Macoutes, after winning the 1957 presidential election that followed the overthrow of the previous military regime. For the next fourteen years, as ‘Papa Doc’ declared himself the divine incarnation of the Haitian nation, the 10,000-strong Macoutes were used to terrorize any opponents to his rule. Initially wary of his *vaudouiste* nationalism, the US soon embraced Duvalier’s staunchly anti-communist regime. When François Duvalier died in 1971, his son Jean-François, ‘Baby Doc’, was proclaimed President for Life and enjoyed still more enthusiastic US support. Foreign aid and elite corruption soared, but for the mass of Haitians pauperization and political oppression continued undiminished.

The gathering flood

By the mid-80s, a new generation was coming of age in the sprawling slums of Port-au-Prince, open to the appeal of liberation theology in

the coded *kreyòl* sermons of radical priests—chief among them, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Born in 1953, Aristide grew up outside the confines of Haiti's traditional political class. A talented linguist, Aristide flourished at the Salesian seminary, and read psychology and philosophy at the State University in the 70s, along with the works of Leonardo Boff and other liberation theologians. He began broadcasting on the local Catholic radio stations that sprang up in the late 70s, before being dispatched by his order to study archaeology in the Middle East in 1979, and then to Montreal for some (unsuccessful) 'theological reprogramming'.¹⁰

By 1985 he was back preaching in Haiti, as the popular upswell against Baby Doc's bloated regime grew into a mass wave of protests. Aristide's Easter sermon that year—'The path of those Haitians who reject the regime is the path of righteousness and love'—was recorded on dozens of cassette players, and heard all over the country. His cry, 'Va-t'en, Satan!' was taken up by the mass movement which, in February 1986, chased Baby Doc off to exile in France, just weeks before Marcos, under similar pressure, was sent packing from the Philippines. The murderous tactics of the junta that followed, under General Namphy, could not demobilize the flood—*lavalas*, in *kreyòl*—of political groups, trade unions, mass organizations, peasant associations and 'little church' community groups, the *ti legliz*. Aristide was now preaching full-time at the church of St Jean Bosco, on the edge of the Port-au-Prince slumtown of La Saline. The elections scheduled for November 1987 were cancelled by the army on polling day, but not before it had engineered the murder of dozens of voters as they waited to cast their ballots. In September 1988 Macoutes stormed Aristide's crowded church, killed members of the congregation and destroyed the building; Aristide was snatched to safety by his supporters. In the protests that followed, rank-and-file troops rose against their officers, driving Namphy out, before a counter-coup under General Avril threw the leading *ti soldats* into jail. The autumn of 1989 brought more mass strikes and mobilizations against Avril's regime, a further bloody crackdown and renewed protests. In March 1990, he too was driven from power.

First Lavalas victory

In December 1990, Aristide stood as the presidential candidate of the Front National pour le Changement et la Démocratie, the loose coalition

¹⁰ Mark Danner, 'Haiti on the Verge', *New York Review of Books*, 4 November 1993.

of popular organizations formed to contest Haiti's first free elections. Aristide swept to an unexpected victory in the first round, with 67 per cent of the vote (the us favourite, World Bank economist and former Duvalier minister Marc Bazin, won only 14 per cent). The Haitian elite lost no time in trying to destabilize him. The first coup attempt came within a month of his election, and was blocked by a massive counter-mobilization. In office, Aristide's room for manoeuvre was limited by the FNCD's minority in the legislature, the ramshackle state and judicial apparatus and the continuing depredations of the Macoutes, checked only by the threat of popular resistance from the slums. Nor did Aristide's gifts as a mass leader translate easily into parliamentary coalition-building or manipulation of the levers of state. Once in power, Aristide moved cautiously, while continuing to speak of a radical redistribution of wealth. He won the support of international lenders by balancing the budget and trimming the corruption-ridden bureaucracy. Otherwise he restricted himself to mild agrarian and educational reforms and the appointment of a presidential commission to investigate the extra-judicial killings of the previous five years.

Even these moderate steps were too much for the elite to tolerate. In September 1991, just seven months after his inauguration, the army seized power again, installing a new junta under General Cédras. Over the next three years the military instituted a reign of terror in an attempt to dismantle the Lavalas networks in the slums; around 5,000 Lavalas supporters were killed. Churches and community organizations were invaded, preachers and leaders were murdered. In September 1993 thugs led by CIA-trained Louis Jodel Chamblain assassinated democracy activist and key Aristide ally, Antoine Izmery. In April 1994, paramilitaries under the leadership of Jean Tatoune, another CIA product, slaughtered scores of civilians in what became known as the Raboteau massacre in the town of Gonaïves.

At the same time, the (exemption-ridden) economic embargo imposed against the Cédras regime led to widespread malnutrition. Waves of emigrants tried to flee to the US. Aristide, exiled in Washington, tried to marshal diplomatic support. Hostile to Aristide's agenda and smarting from the recent Iran-Contra affair, the first President Bush chose to turn a blind eye. Clinton, confident that 'the mission is achievable, and limited', was more amenable. Military success in Haiti would help repair the damage done in Somalia, and Aristide's return would stem the flood of

refugees. US conditions, however, were exorbitant. Aristide had to agree to an amnesty for the coup-makers, in effect pardoning the murder of thousands of his supporters. He had to accept that his term as Haitian president would end in 1995, as if he had served it in full. He had to share power with the opponents that he had defeated so convincingly in 1990, and to adopt most of their highly conservative policies; in particular, he was required to implement a drastic IMF structural adjustment programme.

Aristide was perfectly aware, of course, of the political cost of structural adjustment; his most recent book on the oppressive consequences of globalization is broadly consistent with his speeches of the late 1980s.¹¹ The question that began to divide the Lavalas movement in the mid-1990s was simply, what kind of resistance to US and IMF objectives was feasible? Even someone as critical of Aristide's 'dictatorial turn' as Christophe Wargny believed that 'no Haitian government can survive without American support'.¹² As UN envoy Lakhdar Brahimi—currently hard at work in Baghdad—candidly explained on Haitian radio in 1996, there was never any question that either the US or the UN would tolerate even limited attempts to dilute the elite's monopoly of economic power.¹³ Under the circumstances, Aristide's new government felt it had little room for manoeuvre. And though he won 87 per cent of the vote in the 1995 presidential elections, albeit on a lowered turnout, Aristide's successor René Préval found himself in a still more difficult position.

The attempts of Préval's prime minister, Rosny Smarth, to legislate the unpopular IMF programme would permanently fracture the Lavalas coalition, both inside parliament and in the country as a whole. The politicians most in line with Washington's priorities, and most critical of what they condemned as Aristide's top-down style, banded together under his rival Gérard Pierre-Charles to form a more 'moderate' faction, which eventually called itself the Organisation du Peuple en Lutte. From late 1996, Aristide began organizing a more cohesive party of his own supporters, the Fanmi [family] Lavalas, drawing on his personal authority among the Haitian poor. The split between the OPL and the FL soon became irreversible, paralysing the legislature and blocking the appointment of a new prime

¹¹ Aristide, *Eyes of the Heart: Seeking a Path for the Poor in the Age of Globalization*, Monroe, ME 2000.

¹² Wargny, *Le Monde*, 23 February 2004; and *Haiti n'existe pas*, Paris 2004.

¹³ The elite, Brahimi explained, should 'know two things: that political changes are inevitable, but that, on the ideological, economic front, they have the sympathy of Big Brother, capitalism' Cited in *Haiti Briefing* 25, September 1997

minister or a full cabinet after Smarth's resignation in 1997.¹⁴ Préval finally broke the parliamentary deadlock by dissolving the National Assembly in 1999, and after some delay new elections were held in May 2000.

Globalization comes to Haiti

Predictably, the IMF cure for Haiti's desperate poverty involved further reductions in wages that had already sunk to starvation levels, privatization of the state sector, reorientation of domestic production in favour of cash crops popular in North American supermarkets and the elimination of import tariffs. It was the last of these, easiest to implement, that had the most immediate impact. With the tariff on rice cut from 50 per cent to the IMF-decreed 3 per cent, Haiti—previously self-sufficient in the crop—was flooded with subsidized American grain, and rice imports rose from just 7,000 tonnes in 1985 to 220,000 tonnes in 2002. Domestic rice production has all but disappeared.¹⁵ A similar sequence eliminated Haiti's poultry sector, at the cost of around 10,000 jobs. Haitian farmers tend to associate these developments with the most bitterly resented of all the international community's many aggressive interventions in their domestic economy—the 1982 extermination, to allay the fears of American importers concerned by an outbreak of swine fever, of Haiti's entire native pig population, and their subsequent replacement with animals from Iowa that required living conditions rather better than those enjoyed by most of the island's human population.

As a result of these and related economic 'reforms', agricultural production fell from around 50 per cent of GDP in the late 1970s to just 25 per cent in the late 1990s. Structural adjustment was supposed to compensate for agrarian collapse with an expansion of the light manufacturing and assembly sector. The lowest wages in the hemisphere, backed by a virtual ban on trade unions, had encouraged mainly American companies or contractors to employ around 60,000 people in this sector in the late 1970s, and through to the mid-90s companies like Kmart and Walt Disney continued to pay Haitians around 11 cents an hour to make pyjamas and T-shirts.¹⁶ The companies benefit from tax exemptions lasting

¹⁴ See Kim Ives in *Haiti Progrès*, 12 March 2003 and 27 November 2002.

¹⁵ Oxfam, *Trade Blues*, May 2002.

¹⁶ National Labor Committee, *The us in Haiti: How to Get Rich on 11 Cents an Hour*, New York 1996, and NLC, *Why is Disney Lying?*, New York 2004; see also Ray Laforest in *Haiti Progrès*, 13 August 1997.

for up to 15 years, are free to repatriate all profits and obliged to make only minimal investments in equipment and infrastructure.¹⁷ By 1999, Haitians fortunate enough to work in the country's small manufacturing and assembly sector were earning wages estimated at less than 20 per cent of 1981 levels. Nevertheless, still more dramatic rates of exploitation encouraged many of these companies to relocate to places like China and Bangladesh, and only around 20,000 people were still employed in the Port-au-Prince sweatshops by the end of the millennium. Real GDP per capita in 1999–2000 was estimated to be 'substantially below' the 1990 level.¹⁸

It would be wrong to think that these reforms were implemented with anything approaching Third Way zeal. On the contrary, the Lavalas government was continually criticized for its 'lack of vigour' by international financial institutions: 'Policies imposed as conditions by international lenders have been at best half-heartedly supported by the domestic authorities, and at worst violently rejected by the public'.¹⁹ With its back to the wall, Lavalas resorted to what James Scott has famously dubbed the 'weapons of the weak': a mixture of prevarication and evasive non-cooperation. This proved partially successful as a way of deflecting at least one of the main blows of structural adjustment, the privatization of Haiti's few remaining public assets. Lavalas had good reason to drag its feet. When the state-run sugar mill was privatized in 1987, for example, it was bought by a single family who promptly closed it, laid off its staff and began importing cheaper sugar from the US so as to sell it on at prices that undercut the domestic market. Once the world's most profitable sugar exporter, by 1995 Haiti was importing 25,000 tons of American sugar and most peasants could no longer afford to buy it.²⁰ By contrast, in September 1995 Aristide dismissed his prime minister for preparing to sell the state-owned flour and cement mills without insisting on any of the progressive terms the IMF had promised to honour—opening the sale to middle-class and diaspora participation, and ensuring that some of the money it earned was to go towards literacy, education and compensation for victims of the 1991 coup. Aristide could only delay the process for two years, however. In

¹⁷ Charles Arthur, *Haiti in Focus*, London 2002, p. 51.

¹⁸ Economist Intelligence Unit, *Haiti: Country Profile 2003*, pp. 24, 19.

¹⁹ EIU, *Profile*, p. 17.

²⁰ Lisa McGowan, *Democracy Undermined, Economic Justice Denied: Structural Adjustment and the Aid Juggernaut in Haiti*, Washington, DC 1997.

1997 the flour mill was duly sold for just \$9 million, at a time when its yearly profits were estimated at around \$25 million per year.²¹

The Lavalas government never yielded, however, to US pressure to privatize Haiti's public utilities. At the same time, and with drastically limited resources, it oversaw the creation of more schools than in all the previous 190 years. It printed millions of literacy booklets and established hundreds of literacy centres, offering classes to more than 300,000 people; between 1990 and 2002 illiteracy fell from 61 to 48 per cent. With Cuban assistance, a new medical school was built and the rate of HIV infection—a legacy from the sex tourism industry of the 1970s and 80s—was frozen, with clinics and training programmes opened as part of a growing public campaign against AIDS. Significant steps were taken to limit the widespread exploitation of children. Aristide's government increased tax contributions from the elite, and in 2003 it announced the doubling of a desperately inadequate minimum wage.²²

Opposition to Aristide

The government's course created enemies both to the right and to the left. Unsurprisingly, Aristide came under fire from those who advocated more enthusiastic compliance with the US and IMF, among them the (highly unpopular) Prime Ministers, Smarck Michel (1994–95) and Rosny Smarth (1996–97), along with other members of the OPL. From the beginning, the simple presence of Lavalas in government had terrified a large portion of the dominant class. 'Among the Haitian elite', as Robert Fatton has explained, 'hatred for Aristide was absolutely incredible, an obsession'.²³ With Lavalas in power, many observers noted a 'new confidence among the poor people of Haiti'.²⁴ For the first time in living memory the distribution of private property seemed vulnerable, as occasional instances of land invasion and squatting went unopposed. Though in practice he tended to cooperate with business leaders and international lenders, Aristide appeared willing to strengthen his hand

²¹ Aristide, *Eyes of the Heart*, pp. 31, 15.

²² For a summary of these achievements, see in particular the Haiti Action Committee's 2003 pamphlet, *Hidden from the Headlines: The US War Against Haiti*.

²³ Fatton, quoted in Marty Logan, 'Class Hatred and the Hijacking of Aristide', *Inter Press Service News Agency*, 16 March 2004.

²⁴ David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and National Independence in Haiti*, New Brunswick, NJ 1996.

in government with veiled threats of popular violence against 'bourgeois thieves'.²⁵ 'Panic seized the dominant class', Fatton notes. 'It dreaded living in close proximity to *la populace* and barricaded itself against Lavalas'.²⁶ Gated communities multiplied and the provision of private security became one of Haiti's fastest growing industries. Class sympathy among Western elites who felt themselves under similar threat, both at home and abroad, goes a long way to explaining the recent international perception of the Lavalas regime.

A growing distrust of Aristide's 'demagogic populism', meanwhile, slowly alienated many of the foreign or exiled intellectuals—René Depestre, James Morrell, Christophe Wargny—who had once supported him.²⁷ More importantly, several of Haiti's most significant peasant organizations, including the Movman Peyizan Papay (MPP), Tèt Kole Ti Peyizan and KOZEPEP, as well as the small militant group Batay Ouvriye, condemned the Fanmi Lavalas for its cooperation with structural adjustment and accused it of becoming '*anti-populaire*'. Clément François of Tèt Kole spoke for many critics of Lavalas when he argued that Aristide should not have agreed to the US conditions that allowed him to return from exile: 'he should have stayed outside and let us continue the struggle for democracy; instead, he agreed to deliver the country on a platter so that he could get back into office'.²⁸ MPP leader Chavannes Jean-Baptiste made the same point in 1994, shortly before he became involved in a bitter personal feud with Aristide.

The true extent of popular disaffection with Lavalas is difficult to measure. As a rule, foreign commentators find it 'hard to credit the strength of emotion that Aristide elicited and continues to provoke in Haiti'.²⁹ Tèt Kole and the MPP were certainly weakened by their opposition to Aristide, and neither group remains a significant political force. In the

²⁵ On Aristide's early mix of revolutionary rhetoric and constitutional practice see Mark Danner, 'The Fall of the Prophet', *New York Review of Books*, 2 December 1993 and Alex Dupuy, *Haiti in the New World Order: The Limits of the Democratic Revolution*, Boulder, co 1997, pp. 128–9.

²⁶ Robert Fatton, *Haiti's Predatory Republic: The Unending Transition to Democracy*, Boulder, co 1997, pp. 86–7.

²⁷ Tracy Kidder, 'Trials of Haiti', *The Nation*, 27 October 2003.

²⁸ François, quoted in 'Behind Aristide's Fall', *Socialist Worker*, 12 March 2004, p. 6.

²⁹ Arthur, *Haiti in Focus*, p. 60; cf. Paul Farmer, *The Uses of Haiti*, Monroe, ME 2003, pp. 113–4.

late 90s Jean-Baptiste became an ally of Pierre-Charles's pro-American OPL, before joining, in 2000, the openly reactionary Convergence Démocratique; the militancy of his followers has been dulled, as Stan Goff notes, 'by the steady trickle of project dollars flowing through the almost interminable list of non-governmental organizations that infest every corner of Haiti'.³⁰ The OPL itself is probably the party which most closely resembles that 'civic' alternative to Lavalas so dear to liberal commentators, but after years of futile parliamentary manoeuvring it was virtually wiped out in the 2000 elections.³¹

For all its undeniable faults, in other words, the FL remained the only significant force for popular mobilization in the country. No other political figure of the past fifty years has had anything like Aristide's stature among the urban and rural poor. Reporting from Port-au-Prince in March 2004, the BBC's correspondent was obliged to concede that, whereas Aristide was 'universally reviled' by the wealthy elite, he was still almost as universally affirmed by the great majority of the urban poor.³² The doctor and activist Paul Farmer, who has worked in Haiti's central plateau since the mid-80s, makes a still stronger case for the enduring depth of Aristide's popularity in the countryside.³³ The one demonstration of any size against the FL during the most recent elections was an MPP gathering organized in September 2000. It drew several thousand people. Otherwise, political opposition to Aristide was confined almost entirely to the ranks of the dominant class.³⁴ The Haitian elite found it hard to rally support in the streets. An *Economist Intelligence Unit* report describes the anti-Aristide protest held in November 2003 by the 'Group of 184', which claims to represent a wide range of civil-society organizations:

On the morning of the rally, a few hundred Group of 184 supporters had assembled at the designated site but found themselves heavily outnumbered by as many as 8,000 Aristide loyalists. When some government

³⁰ Stan Goff, 'A Brief Account of Haiti', BRC-NEWS October 1999; cf. Goff, *Hideous Dream: A Soldier's Memoir of the US Invasion of Haiti*, New York 2000.

³¹ Wargny, 'Haiti's Last Chance', *Le Monde diplomatique*, July 2000.

³² Lak, 'Poverty and pride in Port-au-Prince', BBC Radio 4, 20 March 2004.

³³ Farmer, *Uses of Haiti*, pp. 348–75; Farmer, 'Who Removed Aristide?', *London Review of Books*, 15 April 2004.

³⁴ See Béatrice Pouliquen, *Liberation*, 13 February 2001; Fatton, *Haiti's Predatory Republic*, pp. 144–7, 169 fn. 40.

supporters threw stones and shouted threats at their opponents, the police struggled to keep order. As the situation rapidly deteriorated, the police dispersed the crowd using tear gas and firing live ammunition in the air. Meanwhile, the Group of 184's flat-bed truck with a sound system was stopped by police en route to the rally and thirty people travelling in the convoy with it were arrested when police discovered unlicensed firearms. Clearly unable to proceed as planned, the Group of 184 organizers called off the rally before it had begun . . . André Apaid [the Group's coordinator] said the episode showed that the authorities would not allow opponents to assemble and thus were not contemplating fair elections

The report failed to mention that Apaid is an international businessman who owns several factories in Haiti, the founder of Haiti's most prominent commercial TV station, and leading figure in a 2003 campaign to block Aristide's decision to double the minimum wage. It does note, however, that:

The turnout for the rally was lower than might have been suggested by the Group's claim to have more than 300 member organizations. It was scarcely able to assemble more than this number of demonstrators. The presence at the rally of many members of the more affluent sector of society reinforced a perception that the Group of 184, despite its claims to represent civil society, is an organization with little popular appeal. This interpretation was confirmed by the failure of a 'general strike' called by the Group on November 17. Although many private businesses in Port-au-Prince, including private schools and banks, did not open, the state-owned banks, government offices and public transport, as well as street markets, functioned as normal. In the rest of the country the shutdown was largely ignored.³⁵

May 2000 watershed

Despite the massive preponderance of their popular support, however, neither Préval nor Aristide, in his 1991 or 1994–95 spells in office, had ever been able to govern with the full support of the legislature. But in the decisive legislative and local elections of May 2000, a united Fanmi Lavalas won majorities at all levels of government, taking 89 of 115 mayoral positions, 72 of 83 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 18 of the 19 Senate seats contested.³⁶ The 1995 elections

³⁵ EIU, *Country Report January 2004: Dominican Republic, Haiti*, pp. 40–1.

³⁶ Established under the 1987 Constitution, the National Assembly comprises an 83-seat Chamber of Deputies, directly elected from the municipalities, and a 27-seat Senate, three senators representing each of Haiti's nine provinces.

had already ‘completely discredited the so-called traditional political parties—especially those that collaborated with the military regime between 1991 and 1994’, effectively eliminating them from any further role in electoral politics.³⁷ In May 2000, members of the original Lavalas coalition who had turned against Aristide suffered the same fate. For the anti-Aristide opposition, the elections proved that there was no chance of defeating the FL at the polls for the foreseeable future.

It was at this point that the campaign to discredit the Lavalas government entered a new and more intensive phase. During the summer of 2000, most of Aristide’s opponents—dissidents like Pierre-Charles’s OPL and Jean-Baptiste’s MPP, along with right-wing evangelicals, business leaders and ex-Duvalierists—banded together to form the ‘Convergence Démocratique’. From the start, the CD’s main objective was *Option Zéro*: the total annulment of the 2000 elections and a refusal to allow Aristide to participate in any subsequent vote.³⁸ In order to make this strategy seem compatible with democratic conventions, the CD had first to redouble its efforts to portray the FL as irredeemably undemocratic, authoritarian, violent and corrupt—accusations already long familiar from the propaganda that accompanied the Cédras coup in 1991.³⁹

The first priority was to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the FL’s electoral victory. The pretext here was a minor technical complaint made by observers from the Organization of American States. The OAS had

³⁷ Dupuy, *Haiti in the New World Order*, p. 172.

³⁸ Between June 2000 and February 2004, the CD rejected each FL offer of new elections right through to the final attempt at a peaceful resolution to the conflict, a CARICOM-brokered proposal approved by the OAS in mid-February 2004, whereby Aristide would accept one of his opponents as his prime minister, hold new legislative elections and serve out the remainder of his term with severely limited powers. Aristide accepted the deal immediately, as did France and the US. The CD refused it just as immediately and then somehow managed to ‘persuade’ its imperial patrons to follow suit, leaving Aristide with a choice between exile or civil war.

³⁹ For 1991, see the influential contributions by *New York Times* reporter Howard French, e.g. ‘Aristide’s Autocratic Ways Ended Haiti’s Embrace of Democracy’, *New York Times*, 22 October 1991. In many ways, French’s articles read like rough drafts for recent attacks—such as the tirade by Andrew Gumbel: ‘The Little Priest Who Became a Bloody Dictator Like the One He Once Despised’, *Independent*, 21 February 2004; Lyonel Trouillot, ‘In Haiti, All the Bridges Are Burned’, *New York Times*, 26 February 2004; Peter Dailey, ‘Fall of the House of Aristide’, *New York Review of Books*, 13 March 2003. Kim Ives subjects this last article to a point-by-point rebuttal in *Haiti Progrès*, 12 March 2003.

actually described the May 2000 elections as 'a great success for the Haitian population, which turned out in large and orderly numbers to choose both their local and national governments. An estimated 60 per cent of registered voters went to the polls', and 'very few' incidents of either violence or fraud were reported. Even the staunchly anti-FL Centre for International Policy agreed that the May 2000 elections were Haiti's 'best so far'.⁴⁰ The oas subsequently characterized the elections as 'flawed' not because they disputed the fairness of the vote or the overwhelming clarity of its result but because, once the Lavalas victories were recorded, they objected to the methodology which Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) used to count the votes for eight of the seats in the Senate. Rather than include all of the many less popular candidates in its calculation of voting percentages, the CEP—which Haiti's constitution identifies as the sole and final arbiter in all electoral matters—decided to count only the votes cast for the top four candidates in each race. By this method, Lavalas candidates won 16 Senate seats in the first round, taking an average 74 per cent of the vote.⁴¹

The oas had itself been closely involved in the development of this form of calculation, and there is no good reason to believe that the balance of power in the Senate would have been any different whatever method was used. The results are consistent both with the undisputed returns registered in the Chamber of Deputies ballot held at the same time and with a us-commissioned Gallup poll taken in October 2000. In November 2000, Aristide went on to win the presidential election with 92 per cent of the votes cast, on a turnout estimated, by those few international

⁴⁰ Final Report of oas Mission in Haiti, 13 December 2000, p. 2. A more substantial report by the International Coalition of Observers likewise concluded that the 2000 elections were both 'fair and peaceful'. Melinda Miles and Moira Feeney, *Elections 2000: Participatory Democracy in Haiti*, February 2001. Henry Carey, 'Not Perfect, But Improving', *Miami Herald*, 12 June 2000.

⁴¹ *Haiti Progrès*, 31 May 2000. In the North-East department, to take one of the examples least favourable to Lavalas, a total of 132,613 votes were cast for two Senate seats. If all candidates' votes were counted, 33,154 votes would be needed to win a seat on the first round; with only the top four candidates' counted, the FL candidates—who won 32,969 and 30,736 votes respectively, their closest rival polled less than 16,000—went through with comfortable majorities. The head of the CEP maintained that this method was in keeping with past practice: *Haiti Progrès*, 28 June 2000; the point was disputed by the us State Department and opponents of the FL: James Morrell, 'Snatching Defeat from the Jaws of Victory', Centre for International Policy, August 2000.

observers left in the country, at around 50 per cent (although much lower by the opposition).

Throttling aid

The immediate response from the Clinton Administration was to seize upon the OAS objection to the calculations for the senatorial seats in order to justify a crippling embargo on foreign aid—democratic scruples hard to square with Washington's support for the Duvalier dictatorships and the juntas that succeeded them. In April 2001, after cutting off its own aid to Haiti's government, the US blocked the release of \$145 million in previously agreed loans from the Inter-American Development Bank, and of another \$470 million scheduled for the following years. In 1995 the Haitian government had received close to \$600 million in aid. By 2003 the total government budget had been reduced to just \$300 million—under \$40 a head per year for each of its 8 million citizens—minus the annual \$60 million payment on the national debt (45 per cent of which was incurred by the Duvalier dictatorships).⁴² The response of the IMF and other international lenders was to force Haiti to make still deeper cuts in its budget and pay yet higher sums in arrears.

Few governments could survive such sustained financial assault. The combined effect of these measures was to overwhelm an already shattered economy. Haitian GDP fell from \$4 billion in 1999 to \$2.9 billion in 2003. While American exports to Haiti have risen substantially in recent years, a majority of Haitians now live on the edge of starvation, without access to water or medicine; average incomes amount to little more than a dollar a day and unemployment hovers around 70 per cent. In 2001, a bankrupt Aristide agreed to virtually all of the concessions demanded by his opponents: he obliged the winners of the disputed Senate seats to resign, accepted the participation of several ex-Duvalier supporters in his new government, agreed to convene a new and more opposition-friendly CEP and to hold another round of legislative elections several years ahead of schedule. But the US still refused to lift its aid embargo.

The next priority of the CD campaign was to portray the PL as fundamentally authoritarian and corrupt. That there were some grounds for

⁴² Anne Street, *Haiti: A Nation in Crisis*, Catholic Institute for International Relations Briefing, London 2004, p. 4.

this is plain. Drug-running—Haiti has long been a relay station for Colombian cocaine heading north—has increased since 1990. As in other destitute countries patronage remains widespread, even if it falls far short of the ‘officially sanctioned piracy’ characteristic of the pre-Lavalas period.⁴³ More urgently, the legacy of violence in Haiti, from the colonial era through to the dictatorships fronted by Duvalier, Namphy and Cédras, has left deep scars; Aristide himself is the survivor of repeated assassination attempts. The murderous assault on Lavalas during his first exile pushed some pro-FL groups, like Jeunesse Pouvoir Populaire and the Petite Communauté de L’Église de Saint Jean Bosco, to adopt quasi-military forms of self-defence against former soldiers who were disbanded but not disarmed in 1995. Vigilante gangs associated with Lavalas are certainly responsible for some of the violence that has occurred over the past few years. Critics of the FL have been quick to equate these gangs with Duvalier’s Tonton Macoutes.⁴⁴

In a comparative perspective, however, political violence during the Lavalas administrations was far less than under previous Haitian regimes. Amnesty International’s reports covering the years 2000–03 attribute a total of around 20 to 30 killings to the police and supporters of the FL—a far cry from the 5,000 committed by the junta and its supporters in 1991–94, let alone the 50,000 usually attributed to the Duvalier dictatorships.⁴⁵ Examination of Lavalas violence would also suggest that

⁴³ Janice Stromsem and Joseph Trincellito, ‘Building the Haitian National Police’, *Haiti Papers* 6, Washington, DC April 2003.

⁴⁴ Jean-Claude Jean and Marc Maesschalck, *Transition politique en Haïti: radiographie du pouvoir Lavalas*, Paris 1999, pp. 104–11.

⁴⁵ In 2000, Amnesty reported that ‘a number of electoral candidates, party members and their relatives were killed, most by unidentified assailants’, among them the courageous left-wing radio journalist Jean Dominique. There were also ‘several reports of unlawful killings by police, most of the victims were criminal suspects’. In 2001, another journalist, Brignol Lindor, was killed ‘by a mob which included members of a pro-FL organization’, and Amnesty refers to ‘several killings of alleged criminal suspects by police or crowds carrying out “popular justice”’, but identifies only one such victim (Mackenson Fleurimon, who ‘on 11 October was reportedly shot dead by the police in the Cité Soleil neighbourhood of Port-au-Prince’). In 2002, ‘at least five people were reportedly killed’ in confrontations between members of opposing parties, and seven people (three of whom are identified as FL supporters) appear to have been either executed or ‘disappeared’. Amnesty also refers to two other killings in 2002: the shooting of Christophe Lozama, a pro-FL justice of the peace, and the assassination of the bodyguard protecting the widow of Jean Dominique. Pending publication of its 2004 report (which will cover 2003),

it was, indeed, largely a matter of *gang* violence. There are armed gangs in Port-au-Prince, as there are in São Paulo, Lagos or Los Angeles; their numbers have swelled in recent years with the deportation to the island of over a thousand Haitian and Haitian-American convicts from the American prison system. Above all, it should be stressed that the lion's share of recent violence in Haiti has been perpetrated by the us-trained paramilitary forces deployed by opponents of the Lavalas regime since the summer of 2001.

Final assault

Economic constraints paralysed the Lavalas administration and political pressure backed it into a corner; but in the end, only old-fashioned military coercion on the Contra model could dislodge it from power. Leading figures in the Convergence Démocratique made no secret of their intentions at the time of Aristide's reinauguration as president in February 2001; they openly called for another us invasion, 'this time to get rid of Aristide and rebuild the disbanded Haitian army'. Failing that, they told the *Washington Post*, 'the CIA should train and equip Haitian officers exiled in the neighbouring Dominican Republic so they could stage a comeback themselves'.⁴⁶ The us, it seems, obeyed these instructions to the letter.

The insurgency that eventually triggered the second coup began just when it seemed as if Aristide's new administration might finally be making some political progress. Shortly after talks held in mid-July 2001 at the Hotel Montana, the OPI's Pierre-Charles and other leaders of the CD acknowledged that they were close to achieving a 'total agreement' with the FL. Less than a fortnight later, on 28 July, groups of army veterans launched attacks against police stations along the Dominican Republic border, killing at least five officers. What happened next is typical of the pattern that persisted right through to the completion of Option Zéro on 29 February 2004. The government arrested 35 suspects

an Amnesty briefing paper released on 8 October 2003 refers to mounting violence in clashes between FL opponents and supporters, it identifies two FL supporters killed in political confrontations and refers to government claims that four other FL supporters were killed in Cité Soleil. All reports on www.amnesty.org. See also Arthur, *Haiti in Focus*, p. 25; Patrick Bellegarde Smith, *Haiti: The Breached Citadel*, Boulder, co 1990, pp. 97–101.

⁴⁶ *Washington Post*, 2 February 2001.

linked to the attacks, including some CD supporters. With the approval of the US ambassador, the CD responded by breaking off further negotiations with the FL, claiming that Aristide had staged the attacks himself in order to justify a crackdown on his opponents. A similar sequence would follow the next major incident, a full scale assault on the Presidential Palace in December 2001.⁴⁷

What actually began to unfold in Haiti in 2001, in other words, was less 'a crisis of human rights' than a low-level war between elements of the former armed forces and the elected government that had disbanded them. Amnesty International reports indicate that at least 20 police officers or FL supporters were killed by army veterans in 2001, and another 25 in further paramilitary attacks in 2003, mostly in the lower Central Plateau near the US-monitored Dominican border. Militarization of some regional FL groups was an almost inevitable result. Most of the known leaders of this insurgency were trained by the US and, although evidence of Washington's direct support for the 'rebels' will be hard to find, American allegiances have been made perfectly explicit in the wake of Aristide's expulsion.

In the autumn of 2003 the guerrillas based over the border (led by Louis Jodel Chamblain and Guy Philippe) were strengthened by a new insurgency inside Haiti itself led by Jean Tatoune. Despite his close US connections and a conviction for his role in the Raboteau massacre of 1994, Tatoune managed to swing the Gonaïves-based gang known as the 'Cannibal Army' against Lavalas, after making the implausible but widely reported claim that Aristide was behind the murder, in September 2003, of the gang's former leader, long-standing Lavalas activist Amiot Métayer—who also happened to be an equally long-standing enemy of Tatoune.

Demanding reimbursement

In April 2003, the desperately cash-starved Aristide attempted to rally his countrymen with the demand that, in the bicentennial year of Haitian independence, France should reimburse the 90 million francs that Haiti had been forced to pay between 1825 and 1947 as compensation for the loss of colonial property. Assuming a low return of 5 per cent in

⁴⁷ Fatton, *Haiti's Predatory Republic*, pp. 184–5, 206–7.

annual interest, he calculated that the sum was now equivalent to 21 billion American dollars. As Michael Dash has noted, 'Aristide got a lot of support for this demand both inside and outside of Haiti', particularly in Africa and Latin America.⁴⁸ Unlike most slavery-related reparation demands currently in the air, the Haitian claim refers to a precise and documented sum of money extracted in hard currency by the colonial power. Though quick to pour scorn on the claim, the French government was clearly rattled, with Chirac soon resorting to threat: 'Before bringing up claims of this nature', he warned in the summer of 2003, 'I cannot stress enough to the authorities of Haiti the need to be very vigilant about—how should I put it—the nature of their actions and their regime'.⁴⁹

The commission dispatched by the Foreign Ministry to devise a more 'philosophical' defence of the French position duly concluded that, while Haiti had indeed been 'impeccable' in its own payments to France, there was no 'legal case' for the reimbursement claim. To general applause from the French media, the Commission's Report described the FL's demand as 'aggressive propaganda' based on 'hallucinatory accounting'. It noted with some satisfaction that 'no member of the democratic opposition to Aristide takes the reimbursement claims seriously'. It recognized, however, that the opposition and paramilitaries lacked sufficient 'mobilizing force' to see the job through; and that the Americans, though hamstrung by domestic considerations ('boat-people, Black Caucus'), were looking for 'an honourable way out of the crisis'. It stressed that a 'more affirmative' French engagement in Haiti would not be carried out against the interests of the US, but in a spirit of 'harmony and farsightedness'. At stake was an opportunity for 'audacious and resolute coordination'.⁵⁰

Without such intervention, as the Report acknowledged, the Lavalas government could not have been dislodged. The stumbling block was Aristide's continuing popularity. The battering of the last fifteen years had taken its toll on his support, but as the most detailed—and by no means uncritical—study of the recent period concludes, there was no

⁴⁸ Quoted in Dionne Jackson Miller, 'Aristide's Call for Reparations from France Unlikely to Die', *Inter Press Service News Agency*, 12 March 2004.

⁴⁹ *Miami Herald*, 18 December 2003; Heather Williams, 'A Coup for the Entente Cordiale? Why France Joined the US in Haiti', *Counterpunch*, 16 February 2004.

⁵⁰ Debray, *Rapport*, pp. 13, 11, 12, 52–4.

doubt that Aristide still enjoyed ‘undisputed and overwhelming popularity’ among the mass of Haitians.⁵¹ The Gallup poll conducted in October 2000 rated the PL as thirteen times more popular than its closest competitor, and over half of those polled identified Aristide as their most trusted leader.⁵² According to the latest reliable measure, a further Gallup poll conducted in March 2002, the PL remained four times more popular than all its significant competitors combined.⁵³

Return of the old guard

The real goals of the occupation that began on 29 February 2004 are perfectly apparent: to silence or obliterate all that remains of this support. During the first week of their deployment, the Franco-American invasion force operated almost exclusively in pro-Aristide neighbourhoods and killed only PL supporters. Their new puppet Prime Minister Gérard Latortue (a 69-year-old ex-UN factotum and Miami talk-show host) publicly embraced the convicted mass-murderer Tatoune and his ex-army rebels in Gonaïves as ‘freedom fighters’—a move interpreted by the *New York Times* as ‘sending a clear message of stability’.⁵⁴ Latortue’s ‘national unity government’ is composed exclusively of members of the traditional

⁵¹ Fatton, *Haiti's Predatory Republic*, p. 182.

⁵² In the October 2000 poll, Aristide's closest rivals, Evans Paul and Gérard Pierre-Charles, both disaffected members of the original Lavalas coalition, scored only 3.8 and 2.1 per cent respectively; the hapless Bazin, Aristide's rival in 1990, scored less than 1 per cent.

⁵³ A brief exchange in early March on the BBC's flagship news programme illustrates how that support has generally been treated by the world media. After a short interview with the now exiled Aristide, in which he repeated his claim that he had been forced out of office under US pressure, the programme anchor turned to BBC correspondent Daniel Lak in Port-au-Prince and asked, in the corporation's characteristically even-handed way: ‘So it's not completely made up, Aristide does have people who support him, it's not just a handful of thugs who are paid by him?’ Lak replied: ‘Oh absolutely. The people who support him are the poor of this country, the vast majority. There are 8 million Haitians, and probably 95 per cent of them are desperately poor . . . It's the rich and the small middle class who support Aristide's opponents, and the poor who generally support Aristide.’ What then about the conflicting explanations of Aristide's departure: was it effectively a coup, or a voluntary resignation? ‘Is it possible to peer through and establish any truth about this’, asked the anchor, ‘or is it just too difficult, from where you're standing?’ Lak's answer speaks volumes: ‘I think it's just too difficult, um . . . The two options are pretty stark. But it's clear that the Americans did want to see the back of Mr Aristide’ (*The World at One*, BBC Radio 4, 8 March 2004).

⁵⁴ *New York Times*, 21 March 2004.

elite. On March 14, the Haitian police began arresting Lavalas militants on suspicion of unidentified crimes, but decided not to pursue the rebel death squad leaders, even those already convicted of atrocities. The new National Police chief, Léon Charles, explained that while ‘there’s a lot of Aristide supporters’ to be arrested, the government ‘still has to make a decision about the rebels—that’s over my head’.⁵⁵ On March 22 Latortue’s new Interior Minister, the ex-General Hérard Abraham, announced plans to integrate the paramilitaries into the police force and confirmed his intention to re-establish the army which Aristide abolished in 1995.⁵⁶ In late March, anti-Aristide death squads continued to control the country’s second largest city, Cap Haïtien, where ‘dozens of bullet-riddled bodies have been brought to the morgue over the last month’.⁵⁷ While scores of other Aristide supporters were being killed up and down the country, the US Coast Guard applied Bush’s order, in keeping with usual US practice (but in flagrant violation of international law), to refuse *all* Haitian applications for asylum in advance.

The Security Council resolution that mandated the invading Franco-American troops as a UN Multinational Interim Force on 29 February 2004 called for a follow-up UN Stabilization Force to take over three months later. In March, Kofi Annan duly sent his Special Advisor, John Reginald Dumas, and Hocine Medili, to assess the situation on the ground. The ‘Report of the Secretary-General on Haiti’, published in April, took the obfuscatory euphemism of UN discourse to new levels. ‘It is unfortunate that, in its bicentennial year, Haiti had to call again on the international community to help it overcome a serious political and security situation’, wrote Annan. The circumstances of the elected President’s overthrow were decorously skirted, the Secretary-General merely noting that: ‘Early on February 29, Mr Aristide left the country’. The toppling of the constitutional government was deemed to offer Haitians the opportunity of ‘a peaceful, democratic and locally-owned future’.⁵⁸

Admittedly, the realization of that future was to be somewhat protracted. Annan noted that, while the local political parties, including

⁵⁵ Michael Christie, ‘Haiti police begin rounding up Aristide associates’, *Reuters*, 14 March 2004.

⁵⁶ Ibon Villelabeitia and Joseph Guyler Delva, ‘Haiti to integrate rebels into police force’, *Reuters*, 23 March 2004.

⁵⁷ Paisley Dodds, ‘Cap-Haïtien scene’, *Associated Press*, 23 March 2004.

⁵⁸ UNSC, ‘Report of the Secretary-General on Haiti’, 16 April 2004, pp. 31, 3.

the Fanmi Lavalas and Convergence Démocratique, all hoped for general elections before the end of 2004, ‘members of civil society and the international community were of the view that more time would be needed’. Moreover, democracy—when the time was right—should begin at parish-pump levels, since ‘Haiti’s political life has too often been dominated by highly personalized presidential elections, fostering inflammatory rhetoric and distracting the population’s attention from local challenges’. On April 29, the Security Council voted unanimously to send an 8,300-strong UN Stabilization Force from 1 June, under the leadership of Lula’s Brazil, to ‘foster democratic governance’ and, of course, ‘empower the Haitian people’. Among the paragons of popular empowerment dispatching troops to Haiti are Nepal, Angola, Benin and Pakistan.⁵⁹ ‘We will stay until democracy is reinstated’, announced the Chilean UN ambassador, whose country had joined the initial invasion force along with the US, France and Canada. The latter may soon be coming under renewed pressure to prove its loyalty, since—what with the Ivory Coast and Burundi—the UN reports having difficulty in mustering enough Francophone forces for all the missions in hand. As UN spokesman David Wimhurst confessed to the *LA Times*: ‘There’s a surge in peacekeeping, and there’s a squeeze on troops. We’re concerned that it will be difficult for French-speaking countries to step up to the plate.’⁶⁰

Exemplary Haiti

In 1804, the outcome of Haiti’s war of independence dealt an unprecedented blow to the colonial order. The victory celebrated two hundred years ago was to inspire generations of revolutionary leaders all over Africa and the Americas. The triumph of neo-colonialism achieved in February 2004 was clearly meant to ensure that Haiti will never again furnish the ‘threat of a good example’. Reduced to poverty and debt-dependence by reparation payments to its former colonial master, the country was further brutalized by the dramatic polarization of wealth and power imposed by its tiny ruling elite. By the mid-80s, the brutal and corrupt Duvalier dictatorships ended by provoking a mass protest movement too powerful for them to control. When the Haitian elite lost confidence in Jean-Claude Duvalier’s power to preserve the status quo, it initially sought merely to replace his regime with another form of military rule. This solution lasted

⁵⁹ Voting for the occupation force, in addition to the permanent five. Algeria, Angola, Benin, Brazil, Chile, Germany, Pakistan, Philippines, Romania and Spain.

⁶⁰ *Los Angeles Times*, 1 May 2004.

from 1986 to 1990, but the army could only suppress the growing movement by resorting to unacceptably public levels of violence. Unrelenting repression brought Haiti to the brink of revolution.

What began following the Lavalas election victory of 1990 was the deployment of a partially new strategy for disarming this revolution, at a moment when the Cold War no longer offered automatic justification for the repression of mass movements by the overwhelming use of force. Designed not simply to suppress the popular movement but to discredit and destroy it beyond repair, the key to this strategy was the implementation of economic measures intended to intensify already crippling levels of mass impoverishment, backed up by old-fashioned military repression and propaganda designed to portray resistance to elite interests as undemocratic and corrupt. The operation has been remarkably successful—so successful that in 2004, with the enthusiastic backing of the media, the UN and the wider ‘international community’, it resulted in the removal of a constitutionally elected government whose leadership had always enjoyed the support of a large majority of the population.

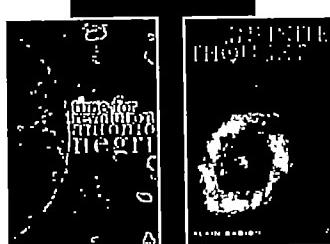
There is every reason to suspect that by the end of this year, many hundreds of FL activists will have been killed. With them will die the chances of rebuilding any inclusive popular movement for at least another generation. The Lavalas leadership had many faults, and there is much to learn from its defeat. But Lavalas was the only organization of the last half-century to have successfully mobilized the Haitian masses in a social and political challenge to their intolerable situation, and it was removed from office through the combined efforts of those who, for obvious reasons, feared and opposed that challenge. If Lavalas also remains a bitterly divisive force, this is largely because it was the only large-scale popular movement ever to question the massive inequalities of power, influence and wealth which have always divided Haitian society. That Lavalas managed to do little to reduce them may say less about the weakness of the movement than it does about the extraordinary strength, today, of such inequalities.

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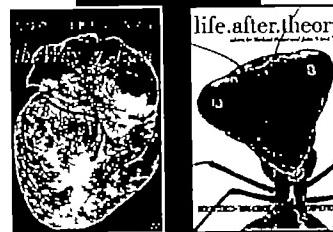
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EMILIE BICKERTON

THE CAMERA POSSESSED

Jean Rouch, Ethnographic Cinéaste: 1917–2004

ACIVIL ENGINEER, and leading authority on Dogon rituals; an Africanist, who turned his ethnographer's camera on 1960s Paris; a second-generation Surrealist, and inspiration for Truffaut's audacious final scene in *Les Quatre cents coups*. Jean Rouch's long career as an anthropologist and film-maker reads like one of Apollinaire's *poèmes conversations*, sentences and verses fused from snatches overheard at café tables: separate people, events, moments in time, brought together in ways that seem to suggest a new sort of life. Rouch appears in many of his own films—there were over a hundred of them—as a mischief-making *bon viveur*, always ready to poke fun. André Breton and Luis Buñuel attended his early screenings—Buñuel declaring himself, after *Les Maîtres fous*, 'fascinated and afraid'. A pioneering figure in the history of visual ethnography, he was also a profound influence on the *Cahiers du cinéma* directors, a living link between metropolitan Surrealism, African liberation and the *Nouvelle vague*. His thesis *La Religion et la magie Songhay*, published in 1960, remains a vital resource. Rouch was attending a film festival in Niger in February this year when his car crashed, killing him and injuring his wife, Jocelyne Lamothe, the actor Damouré Zika, and filmmaker Moustapha Alassane. He had been active and involved to the last, giving screenings of his films from Iran to Mozambique—making his loss, at the age of 86, terribly premature.

Rouch was born in 1917, in Paris. His Catalan father, a meteorologist, had sailed with Jean-Baptiste Charcot's 1908 expedition to the Antarctic, on the *Pourquoi Pas?* His mother was a *normande* artist, whose brother had also been part of Charcot's team. Both parents were connected to

the avant-garde, and Rouch was alluding as much to Breton's mantra as to the explorer's ship when he said, 'I consider myself a child of the *Pourquoi Pas?*' His early years were peripatetic ones, travelling with the family—his father now a French naval attaché—to ports in Algeria, Turkey, Morocco, the Balkans, Greece and Germany, before moving to Paris in the early 1930s for his baccalaureate. Rouch plunged into the cultural life of the city, hearing Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong play their first set there, catching new theatre by Cocteau and Anouilh. He discovered, more or less simultaneously, the work of the Surrealists and the African landscapes and Dogon masks that Marcel Griaule had brought back from his 1931 Dakar-to-Djibouti expedition for the new Musée de l'Homme.

If Rouch's interest in these objects sprang in part from the cult of the artefact developed in Cubist and Surrealist circles, passionate about *l'art nègre*, it was also informed by lectures from Griaule and Germaine Dieterlan, early ethnographic footage screened at the Cinémathèque and articles in *Minotaure* that insisted on their scientific value. For Rouch, Surrealism and anthropology, art and science, were never separate worlds. Nor did he ever lose his early sense of shock and fascination with the two. As he put it: 'For me, de Chirico's paintings are connected with the Dogon landscape'.¹ The first films he saw were *Nanook of the North* and *Robin Hood*,² but as a student he was a regular at Henri Langlois's early screenings, watching Buñuel's *Un Chien andalou*, Vertov's *Enthusiasm* and André Breton's favourite film, *Peter Ibbetson*, in a basement on the Champs-Elysées even before the Cinémathèque was founded—as well as Chaplin, Renoir, Stroheim, Clair.³

Rouch initially chose to train, though, not as an artist or anthropologist but as an engineer, enrolling at the Écoles des Ponts et Chaussées in

¹ 'A Life on the Edge of Anthropology and Film', conversations between Lucien Taylor and Jean Rouch, December 1990. Reprinted in Jean Rouch, *Ciné-Ethnography*, Minneapolis, MN 2003, pp. 132–46.

² After watching *Nanook* in Brest, the young Rouch often dreamt he was in the middle of a snowstorm, but the film written by Douglas Fairbanks made him cry as the people got killed. His mother, he recalled, assured him they were only actors. But, he asked, was this also true for Nanook and his family? Her reply—no, Nanook was real—would be his first lesson in what films could be.

³ Peter Wollen, 'Jean Rouch', in *Paris Hollywood: Writings on Film*, London 2002, p. 94.

1937. He would later apply the rigorous disciplines of this formation—practical tasks informed by imaginative mathematical understanding—to his anthropology. Making his first inventory of the Songhay gods for his doctoral thesis in Niger, Rouch would recall the way his teacher Albert Coquot had slowly initiated the students into the apparently irrational principle of the resistance of materials to successive stresses: through precise analysis, the strangeness would slowly disappear. As an engineer, he would later explain, he had learnt that ‘everything has already been invented’.⁴

In 1941, disillusioned by the ease with which his country had folded in the wake of Nazi invasion, and well aware of the difficulties of living in occupied France, Rouch enlisted as a civil engineer and was posted to the French West African territory of Niger. Legend has it that he left Paris with nothing in his bag but a copy of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of the Spirit* and Michel Leiris’s *L’Afrique fantôme*.⁵ Rouch’s first encounter with Africa was thus as an ‘empire-builder’—of roads and bridges—and structured by the rapidly deteriorating colonial relationship. He quickly understood the barbarity of the situation, finding the colonists ‘more Vichysois than the Parisians’. A labour force of some twenty-thousand Africans toiled without tools or machinery, ‘mak[ing] bridges like Romans, just cutting stones’. Over them stood the ‘mad masters’ so savagely mimicked in one of his greatest films: the site bosses who routinely exploited their unconditional authority over the huge workforce. Rouch was soon deemed too close to his African colleagues—he was intrigued by the possession rituals he witnessed in the local villages—and expelled from Niger by the governor for being ‘a Gaullist’. Rouch was eventually relocated to the Senegal River, now under Allied occupation, and spent two years there,

⁴ Rouch, ‘A Life on the Edge’, p. 131.

⁵ Another member of Griaule’s 1931 expedition, Leiris was one of the first ethnographers to confront the political and epistemological constraints of colonialism on fieldwork. His unclassifiable *L’Afrique fantôme* (1934)—at once travel diary, ethnography and self-analysis—confessed in its *prière d’insérer* to the malaise that drove him on his trips to faraway lands: ‘Sick of Paris, viewing travel as a poetic adventure . . . what does he find? Few adventures . . . an emotional void of growing proportions . . . His attempted escape has been a complete failure . . . caught up in new phantoms—but this time without illusions’: *Brisées*, Paris 1966, pp. 54–5. See also Leiris, ‘L’ethnographie devant le colonialisme’, *Les Temps modernes*, no. 58, 1950, and James Clifford, ‘Tell Me About Your Trip. Michel Leiris’, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*, Cambridge, MA 1988, pp. 165–74.

training with explosives to prepare for the crossing of the Rhine.⁶ One of his first film scripts was written amid the ruins of Berlin, and published by Cocteau in *Fontaine* in 1945.

Anti-colonial ethnography?

Back in Paris, Rouch approached Marcel Griaule—who would take the first chair in Ethnology at the Sorbonne in 1946—to supervise his doctoral thesis, the seminal ethnographic study of the Songhay. French anthropology had originally established itself as a colonial discipline *par excellence* under Maurice Delafosse, who taught the ethnographic method—concrete ways to ‘know’ Africa—to officers passing through the École Coloniale at the beginning of the twentieth century. By contrast Marcel Mauss, a nephew of Durkheim and teacher at the Collège de France from 1931, encouraged a documentary approach to fieldwork which involved amassing as complete a corpus as possible of another culture’s literature, artefacts and tools, with the aim of developing ‘total social facts’. In part a recognition of the universality of post-World War I chaos, Mauss provided his students not so much with a *méthode* as with ‘an enormous checklist’. His dictum, ‘You will film all techniques’, was another aspect of this undifferentiated quest. As a result, the Malinowskian ethnographies or Boasian theory that characterize early British and US anthropology did not develop a distinctive French counterpart. Mauss’s students (among them Charles LeCœur and Leiris, as well as Griaule) would pursue radically different paths.⁷

Although never questioning the virtues of colonial rule in Africa, Griaule possessed an acute and often ironic awareness of his own position, at a time when it was conventional anthropological practice to erase or legitimate one’s presence.⁸ A culture ‘could be revealed only by a kind of violence: the ethnographer must keep the pressure’ on his informants.⁹ He would confront lies, manipulation, secrets—and, using tactics of interrogation, must ‘parade across his face as pretty a collection of masks as that possessed by any museum’.¹⁰ This was a rare acknowledgment

⁶ Rouch, ‘A Life on the Edge’, 1990.

⁷ Clifford, *Predicament of Culture*, pp. 55–91.

⁸ See Talal Asad’s classic essay, ‘Two European Images of Non-European Rule’, in Asad, ed., *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, New York 1973, pp. 103–18.

⁹ Marcel Griaule, *Méthode de l’ethnographie*, Paris 1957, p. 14.

¹⁰ Griaule, ‘Introduction méthodologique’, *Minotaure*, no. 2, vol. 10.

of the intrusive nature of fieldwork, a recognition that the element of theatricality required on the ethnographer's part to 'provoke the truth' necessarily reproduced itself in those he was supposedly observing.

But the colonial structures of segregation and authority that had dictated the status and relationships of his anthropological predecessors were in the process of disintegrating as Rouch entered the field. His work would chart the complex transition from occupation to independence, from village life to a fraught and contradictory modernity, in the emergent nations of West Africa—Niger, Ghana, the Ivory Coast and Mali. At the same time, in Rouch's practice anthropology retained a Surrealist willingness to give primacy to dreams. The mysticism and possession rituals he had encountered in Niger seemed an extension of Surrealism's ambitions, as a movement dedicated to an art of spontaneous creation that would explore and seek to unify the human psyche. In recognizing the potency of the dreamworld, both strategies possessed the power to inject chaos into convention, to create a more direct, improvised vision.

In 1946 Rouch and two wartime friends, Pierre Ponty and Jean Sauvy, returned to Niger, equipped with an ex-army 16mm Bell & Howell camera and a few reels of black-and-white film stock. Funding was supplied by a photographic commission from Agence France-Presse, where the trio had done collective journalism under the name Jean Pierjean.¹¹ They journeyed down the Niger River—a pledge the three of them had made on their last visit, as engineers—and met with Griaule, doing field-work in Bandiagara. Rouch would later recount the making of his first film, the fifteen-minute *Au pays des mages noirs*, on the rituals of the Sorko hippopotamus hunters, as a chaotic concatenation of events in which he was forced to improvise with a hand-held camera—a largely untried technique—after losing the tripod overboard. But his approach was already profoundly informed by two key influences: the Irishman, Robert Flaherty, and the Russian, Dziga Vertov.

Flaherty's groundbreaking *Nanook of the North* (1921) had introduced what Luc de Heusch called the 'participatory camera'. Filming the Inuit Eskimo hunters on his own with a 35mm camera, Flaherty was faced

¹¹ Transportation was provided by Théodore Monod, director of the Institut Français d'Afrique Noire, whom Rouch had met in Dakar following his expulsion from Niger.

with a classic ethnographic problem: asking people who knew nothing of film-making to 'stage' events, in order to show the reality of their lives—including in this instance creating a 'set', an igloo big enough to fit the camera-clad Flaherty and the whole Inuit family. Flaherty's solution was to build an igloo-laboratory, develop his film on the spot and project the rushes for Nanook to see—simultaneously illuminating the alien film-making project and allowing for a process of collaboration between the two men. His pioneering work transformed the dilemmas of anthropological fieldwork over authenticity and ethics. When Flaherty took the step of showing Nanook what he was shooting, the camera, as Rouch would put it, was 'no longer an obstacle [but] the third member of this strange business of film-making . . . [it] was participating in the film'.¹²

From Vertov, on the other hand, Rouch drew the notion of 'bringing the camera to the man': the 'movie eye', or *kinok*, would fuse with the human eye—and later, as Vertov predicted, the 'radio ear'.¹³ The 'Man with the Movie Camera' walked the streets of post-revolutionary Moscow and 'seized improvised life', spontaneity and chance playing their own, unpredictable parts in the attempt at a closer rendition of the real: 'I am the mechanical eye . . . I will be liberated from immobility . . . in perpetual movement. I draw to things . . . move myself away from them . . . enter into them'.¹⁴ Vertov's strategies, like Flaherty's, helped Rouch to discover the emancipatory potential of technology.

Delirious dissent

Griaule, Leiris and Lévi-Strauss attended the first screening of *Au pays des mages noires* at the Musée de l'Homme in 1947; soon after, the film was shown again alongside Rossellini's *Stromboli*.¹⁵ From the start, Rouch was part of two worlds: academic anthropology—graduate from the Sorbonne, co-founder of ethnographic film institutions, long based at the Centre National de la Recherche, a UNESCO position, visiting professor at Harvard—and the French avant-garde. The 1954 screening

¹² Jean Rouch, National Film Theatre lecture, 1978.

¹³ For a more detailed account of Vertov's importance to Jean Rouch, see his preface, 'Cinq regards sur Dziga Vertov', to Georges Sadoul's *Dziga Vertov*, Paris 1972.

¹⁴ Dziga Vertov, quoted in Jean Rouch, 'The Camera and Man', 1973. Reprinted in Paul Hocking, ed., *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, Berlin 1995.

¹⁵ Rossellini and Rouch would work together in 1957 at a Collective Creative Workshop attended by most of the future directors of the *Nouvelle vague*.

of *Les Maîtres fous* at the Musée de l'Homme caused controversy and excitement in both. Its subject is the secret Hauka sect, which had originally emerged in 1920s Niger in resistance to French colonial rule. The film follows the sect's revival among recent migrants to the British-run Gold Coast (Kumasi and Accra). Joining the high priest Mountyéba in the forest, its members undergo a violent possession by the spirits of their colonial masters, taking on the identities (as Rouch's narration explains) of Secretary General, the Corporal of the Guard and Ordinance Lieutenant. In over-elaborate gestures the men imitate their British counterparts, marching in tiny circles, their legs kicking towards the sky, the etiquette of the army feverishly preserved. As night falls over the forest, the scenes become increasingly disturbing as, foaming at the mouth, their hands trembling and eyes white and wide-open, the men proceed with the various ritual stages: the initiation of a new member, the sacrifice of an animal, drinking its blood. These were the scenes that so frightened the director of *Un Chien andalou*.

At the end of the film the men return to the city, to their day jobs in the pits, on the roads, at the market. In his closing commentary Rouch suggests an explanation for the shocking scenes: 'when comparing these smiling faces to the contortions of yesterday . . . one really wonders whether these men of Africa have found a panacea against mental disorders . . . whether they have found a way to absorb our inimical society'. For Rouch it was essential to convey that these men were neither primitives nor insane, to understand their strange practices in the broader context of the violent transition from village to city life, to an industrial civilization imposed from outside. The suggested 'panacea' may seem an endorsement of the ritual as quelling actual political dissent. But Rouch the Surrealist was also speaking—the ritual reflected the importance of giving freedom to the imagination. 'Therapy for the Africans is not a one-on-one private consultation', Rouch argued, his view characteristic of the broader Surrealist tendency to disregard what Tristan Tzara had described as Freud's objective in the analysis of dreams, to 'live in a state of bourgeois normality'. 'The therapy we filmed was a public ritual done in the sun. That aspect is one of the most important things we Westerners need to learn'.

In 1954, the hostile responses centred primarily around the mockery of white authority, which Rouch made even more overt by cutting to documentary footage of a British colonial army trooping the colours.

Following the screening, London banned the film in its West African territories. African intellectuals were offended by the close-up shots of wild-eyed black men drinking animal blood. Griaule, '*rouge comme un bifteck seignant*',¹⁶ called for the film to be destroyed; he was deeply disturbed by the scenes of Africans burlesquing whites. Griaule's response reflected the sharp generation gap between teacher and pupil. The moment of decolonization in West Africa—of the countries in which Rouch had spent most time, Ghana won independence in 1957, Niger, the Ivory Coast and Mali in 1960—was shattering the world that Griaule had worked so hard to understand. Rouch was not only uniquely open to that transition but, through his camera, an active participant in the process—perhaps distinguishing himself here from the *négritude* of most Surrealists. Beyond mere documentation of the changing world, his work aspired to find new forms for its self-expression.¹⁷ His films would give voice to the subjective experience of modernity for the young men of West Africa, in particular—the freedoms and the exploitation of city life; euphoria, desperation and disappointment; the unexorcized horrors of colonial subjugation, the absurdities of the racial pyramid.

Hollywood in Abidjan

The *malentendu complet* surrounding the reception of *Les Maîtres fous* extended to those keen to praise it. Despite the film's clear opening statement that all involved were willing participants, and that it was Rouch and his camera who had entered into the rules of the Haukas' game so as to record it, Rouch was asked by one of the *Cahiers* critics, Claude Chabrol, how he was able to direct his actors to do such extraordinary things. His 1957 film, *Moi, un noir*, was fiction—cited by Godard as evidence for his claim that 'all great fiction films tend towards documentary, just as all great documentaries tend towards fiction'—although its protagonists were working-class Ivory Coast migrants, whose post-synched commentary on the footage formed much of the soundtrack.¹⁸ This strategy in turn drew criticism from the anthropologists. Lévi-Strauss rejected the notion that *cinéma vérité* might be of any ethnographic value. 'It becomes necessary to transform truth into a spectacle', he

¹⁶ As Rouch described him in Manthia Diawara's 1995 documentary, *Rouch in Reverse*

¹⁷ See Anna Grimshaw, 'The anthropological cinema of Jean Rouch', in *The Ethnographic Eye. Ways of Seeing in Anthropology*, Manchester 2003, esp. pp. 110–2.

¹⁸ Godard quoted in Wollen, *Paris Hollywood*, p. 99.

complained, 'because truth taken by itself would be too boring and no one would want to watch . . . It would probably be better made with professionals, a scenario and a *mise en scène*'.¹⁹ Academic anthropology continued to regard ethnographic film as a visual form of note-taking. In Rouch's work, the camera was put to use as part of the process of creating a world, not simply discovering it.

Rouch describes how the idea for *Moi, un noir* came to him one Sunday night, 'in a bar in Treichville', a sprawling slum of Abidjan:

The contrast between this shortlived Sunday exuberance and the everyday misery is so strong that I know it will haunt me right up to the moment that I can give it some expression. How? . . . The only solution was to make a film about it, where it would not be me crying out my joy or my revolt, but one of these people for whom Treichville was both heaven and hell . . . *Moi, un noir* appeared to me as a necessity.²⁰

The film's central character would be Oumarou Ganda, a young man Rouch got to know in Treichville. Originally from Niger, Ganda had attended classes in Niamey and served with the French forces in Indo-China, but was now working for 225 colonial francs a day as an unskilled labourer at the Customs depot in Abidjan, carrying sacks of coffee, cocoa, flour. 'We're made only for this—for the sacks', he cries on the post-synch commentary. 'This is what life is: the sacks. Our comrades, the sacks!' His experience as a migrant, Rouch's opening commentary suggests, was emblematic of the modern world: someone who knows how to do everything at home, and in the city, knows nothing. 'One of the things wrong with Africa's new towns: young men without jobs.'

Rouch sets out his method at the beginning of the film:

For six months I followed a group of young immigrants from Niger who were living in Treichville. I proposed to make a film where they would play themselves, and would be free to do and say everything. This is how we improvised the film.

The French colonial administration tried to ban the film throughout their territories, particularly worried by a fight scene between Ganda and

¹⁹ Interview with Lévi-Strauss conducted by Jacques Rivette and Michel Delahaye in *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 156, 1965.

²⁰ Rouch, 'The Cinema of the Future?' [1960], reprinted in *Ciné-Ethnography*, pp. 266–73. Translation amended.

an Italian seaman who steals his girl on Saturday night. In the Ivory Coast itself only a censored version could be shown—because its subject was ‘a man on the street, rather than a lawyer or a doctor’, Rouch explained.²¹ In *Moi, un Noir* Ganda is both at the centre of the raucous, mobile city and fully aware of his isolation from what it promises. The film is framed as an adventure, Ganda and his friends take on the identities of Edward G. Robinson, Dorothy Lamour, Tarzan, Eddy Constantine and the Lemmy Caution that Constantine played. Aspirations and frustrations are expressed through the use of cinema as a realm of fantasy; but the post-synchronized soundtrack of Rouch’s film also gives its protagonists an element of power over the images, the chance to talk back. The film thus becomes a mirror in which Ganda discovers himself.

The participatory camera

For Godard, who saw it in 1958, *Moi, un noir* was ‘the greatest French film since the Liberation’. It reminded him of *Rome, Open City*—‘Neo-Realism, but mixed in with the Surrealist concept of “objective chance”’!²² For the *Nouvelle vague*, Rouch was a crucial pioneer of the new technology—portable cameras, colour film, microphones—as well as a fertile source of *cinéma vérité* strategies: weaving fiction into documentary, playing on the multiple fantasies of cinema by allusions to B-movie characters (the return of Constantine/Caution in Godard’s *Alphaville*), combining imaginative freedom with the apparent constraints of (in his case) ethnography, and the experiments of shooting in real light and real time. Taking to the street and bringing the camera to the man dispensed with the need for sets, stars and large budgets—liberation from the traditional film industry.²³

Godard invoked Rouch as the master of improvisation, in contrast to his classicist heroes Eisenstein and Hitchcock: ‘The others, people like Rouch, don’t know exactly what they’re doing, and search for it. The film

²¹ Quoted in Mick Eaton, ed., *Anthropology-Reality-Cinema: The Films of Jean Rouch*, London 1979, p. 8.

²² Wollen, *Paris Hollywood*, p. 99.

²³ ‘Gare du Nord’ is one example. the sixteen-minute short was Rouch’s contribution to *Paris vu par* (1965), a collaboration with the New Wave directors (Chabrol, Rohmer, Godard). Rouch shot the piece in two takes, changing magazines during the darkness of the lift sequence halfway through, a scene integral to the technical possibility of the film as well as the narrative.

is the search.²⁴ *Chronique d'un été* (1960) is a striking example of this. The initial idea came from the sociologist Edgar Morin: to see if film could 'break the membrane which isolates each of us from others, in the métro, on the street, in the stairway'—to become a *cinéma de fraternité*.²⁵ In the summer of 1960 Rouch and Morin took the camera walking through the streets of Paris and along the beaches of Saint-Tropez. The participants—students, workers, young professionals—talked to the camera, to each other and to themselves, and then later gathered to watch the rushes and determine the outcome of the film; Rouch effectively synthesizing Flaherty's participatory camera and Vertov's *kinok*.

The film was technically as well as formally innovative and improvisational. The first cameraman Rouch employed had refused to 'go walking' with the camera, a technique that the Canadian Michel Brault had described to Rouch as being deployed by experimental young Québécois film-makers in the late fifties. Rouch took Brault on instead, but also asked André Coutant to build a large-scale model of a new military prototype being used in a space satellite—and which then became the portable 35mm camera. 'We began to make our film with a camera that didn't totally exist', Rouch recalled.²⁶

'Marceline and Marilou talk to themselves, they are in search of themselves—this is what bothers us. It feels like an intrusion, but at the same time it is because of this that we are drawn in', reflects one of the students—the young Régis Debray—as the group watch the footage in the final scenes of *Chronique d'un été*. (As Rouch later admitted, the 'cross-section of Parisian society' was in fact largely drawn from the group Socialisme ou Barbarie, of which his co-director was a member: 'a sub-tribe with substance'.) Debray's comment eloquently evokes the tension between exhibitionism and authenticity latent in the project, as in any attempt at *cinéma vérité*. But what is captured here in embryo are the ideas and experiences that would characterize *les événements* eight years later. In the alienation of Angelo, the Renault factory worker, we

²⁴ 'B. B. of the Rhine', in Jean Narboni and Tom Milne, eds, *Godard on Godard: Critical Writings by Jean-Luc Godard*, New York 1986, p. 101.

²⁵ Edgar Morin, 'Chronicle of a Film', *Studies in Visual Communication*, vol. II, no. 1, 1985, pp. 4–29.

²⁶ 'The Politics of Visual Anthropology', interview with Jean Rouch by Dan Georgakas, Udayan Gupta and Judy Janda, 1977. Reprinted in *Ciné-Ethnography*, pp. 210–25.

clearly sense the imminent revolt bubbling below the surface. Marilou, the young Italian, is the emancipated modern woman who has her freedom but doesn't know what to do with it—not so much oppressed by society as trapped by her own isolation from it.

Integral characters in their own production, Morin and Rouch try to provoke the participants into debate. The discussions are intercut with newspaper headlines: the crisis in 'White Congo', the war in Algeria. Whilst Morin, serious and militant, pushes the political, Rouch concentrates more on the unspoken assumptions of the group, looking for what would leave them uncomfortable and expose their prejudices. ('He finds life fun', Morin would explain morosely.) Parodying his own discipline, Rouch introduces Landry, a student from the Ivory Coast, as the 'black explorer of France on vacation', taking the team to Saint-Tropez. As the group sit around at lunchtime and light-heartedly broach the topic of racism and racial solidarity among Africans, Rouch stages a moment: he asks the two African students what the numbers on Marceline's arm signify. Perhaps 'affection', or a 'phone number' they suggest, to a table of quietly horrified Europeans. Marceline, taking on a strange righteousness in her victimhood, explains. It is a characteristic intervention, although Rouch admitted to being a little embarrassed by it afterwards, his 'cruel smile' caught on camera as the idea flashed through his mind.²⁷

At the opening of *Chronique* Rouch mischievously prods the earnest Morin, 'Go ahead, ruffian, attack!' This *ciné-provocation*, as he would call it, takes much from Griaule's *ethnographie vérité*: the objects of study, as much as the anthropologist in the field, are never passive but become subjects during the investigation. Rouch saw the potential of film for a more direct communication with the cultures and practices he sought to understand. The camera was a means of abolishing the barriers that Leiris, for example, had encountered—of overcoming the impasse in understanding imposed by colonial structures. This led Rouch to criticize as 'stolen images' the scenes he had initially filmed for *Chronique* with a hidden camera, Vertov's 'candid eye'. He preferred to use the camera, and his own presence, as a catalyst, 'not an obstacle to expression, rather, an indispensable witness which [makes] that expression possible'; an accelerator, getting people to reveal themselves.²⁸

²⁷ Rouch, 'The Politics of Visual Anthropology', pp. 211–2.

²⁸ See *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 112, 1960.

The remarkable eight minutes that make up *Tourou et Bitti* (1971) would appear as a testament to this catalytic power. Rouch's 'entry into the game' at a ceremony held by the Simiri in the Zermaganda seems to have had a profound effect. For four days the priest, Zima Sido, moving and dancing to the beats of the ancient drums, *tourou* and *bitti*, had been calling the black spirits of the bush to protect the crops against locusts, to no avail. But as Rouch and his sound director approached, the spirits finally descended on him and took possession. Here, in what he described as an 'ethnographic film in the first person', Rouch seems both excited and disturbed. As the ceremony intensifies, he retreats. The film's brevity is self-imposed: Rouch uncharacteristically zooms out, turning the camera's gaze to the neutral vision of the setting sun.

Rouch would describe his own experience during the filming of *Tourou et Bitti* as one of *ciné-transe*, in which the fused man-camera is now so fully immersed in the events that he becomes a critical agent of the possession process: 'Upon seeing the film again, it seemed that the filming itself unleashed and accelerated the possession. And I would not be surprised to learn from the priests of the Simiri . . . that it was my *ciné-transe* that played the role of essential catalyst that evening'.²⁹ This could hardly be further from the 'techno-objectivity' which anthropologists traditionally expected of the camera, considered as a strictly scientific instrument (rather than a 'musical' one, in Peter Wollen's phrase). This approach characterized earlier works—for example, 'Character Formation' (1936–8) by Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson on Bali—but continues today, with the use of films such as Robert Gardner's 1985 *Forest of Bliss* as 'magic-lantern' visual aids to accompany a lecture.

Shared anthropology

The film-maker Ousmane Sembène said of Rouch's films in 1965 that he tended to show traditional aspects of African life and 'dwelt on a reality without showing its evolution . . . you observe us like insects', he accused.³⁰ The accusation is an arrow to the heart of anthropological practice: historical accomplice to colonialism, the study of others which takes from, but is not, history or politics; nor, in its social and cultural forms, science. By any logic of representational politics no European

²⁹ Rouch, *Ciné-Ethnography*, p. 370.

³⁰ Ousmane Sembène, 'Jean Rouch—Ousmane Sembène: Comme des insectes', *CinéAction*, no. 17, 1982, pp. 77–8.

can film Africans; indeed, no other can film another. The strongest counter to these remarks is what Rouch called 'shared anthropology'.³¹ Like many of his peers, he was concerned to present others as equal and to show their cultures and practices as rational—a demystification of the heart of darkness. More unique was his application of this in film. Rejecting the hidden camera, and usually spurning zoom techniques that brought only 'ocular intimacy', akin to the isolated insights of a voyeur, Rouch's films deployed what he called 'audiovisual feedback' as a necessary element of their construction—the dialogue which developed between himself and his participants after he had projected the rushes to them, Flaherty style. The technique often made for a laborious process. *La Chasse au lion d'arc*, for example, was started in 1957 and took seven years to complete as the hunters, year after year, found the footage of their kills unsatisfactory, not true to reality, and summoned Rouch back with a telegram when the annual hunt was about to recommence. The direct communication engendered by this method ensured, despite the years in between, a particular rigour and validity to the final work and goes some way to answering the criticisms made by Sembène.

Contemporary anthropologists continue to debate these issues, and any assertion of an authorial voice remains open to the charge of neo-colonialism. Rouch's work, in marked contrast to this impasse, took his subjects as much as himself to be protagonists in the project, active creators of a new world. His later films would be characterized by a strong suspicion of development and NGO programmes, which he often spoke of as providing only 'poison gifts'.³² It would be a mistake to assimilate his version of 'shared anthropology' and mutual dialogue with the more vacuous buzzwords these have become today. The repatriation of museum artefacts, for example—a project that Rouch apparently resisted at the Musée de l'Homme—is often hailed as creating 'new sites of contestation' and 'opportunity for dialogue' between different cultures. There is a certain accommodation to the incommensurable differences between cultures: so it's good to talk, but essentially, the nebulous 'multiplicity of perspectives' reigns. For Rouch, on the contrary, these were practices of a shared discovery, and in film one that aimed to give expression to new forms of collective experience brought forth by a changing world.

³¹ Rouch also stressed that his monographs on occasion made an essential ethnographic accompaniment to his films, providing a context and charting an evolution that he was sometimes unable to represent cinematically.

³² This is particularly the theme in the 1992 film, *Madame l'Eau*.

'What is important... is to make films that are giving birth to new films', Rouch declared, paraphrasing Vertov, in 1978.³³ Films begetting films are a trademark of Rouch's work: the triumphant trip to Accra in *Jaguar* (1967) would have its sequel in 1969 with *Petit à petit*, whose heroes, Damouré, Lam and Tallou, appear in countless subsequent films. *La Pyramide humaine*, made in 1959, explored the after-effects of being in a film on the participants' lives, and Oumarou Ganda would become a film-maker himself in Niger. Driving around Paris in his Bugatti, there was equally something of the artisan in Rouch's working method, underscored by the screenings that he would give, with live commentary, right up to the end. Not only every film but every showing was unique. He was fully aware of the difficulties and misunderstandings that hedged his work, which was in a sense always presented in an alien cultural context. 'How will you see?' he asked in *Madame l'Eau* (1992), offering us a guide along the treacherous road, as his narration guided Tallou on his fabled donkey-journey back to Niger from Holland:

I know the evening and have often seen what man believes to have seen.
Take care Tallou: Damouré and Lam are two soul-devouring sorcerers.
Quick! Quick! Those who have eyes have looked for them in vain. How will
you see them?

³³ National Film Theatre Lecture.

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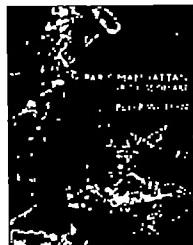
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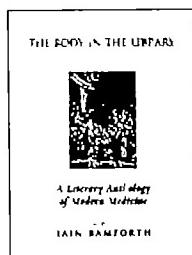
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STEFAN COLLINI

ON VARIOUSNESS; AND

ON PERSUASION

AS THIS IS, I understand, to be the final instalment of the current exchange between Francis Mulhern and myself in these pages, it may be helpful if I try, very briefly, to summarize the main steps in the argument so far. I do not pretend this is an adequate account of the exchange in its entirety; it concentrates on what seems to me to have been the main locus of dispute between us, at least before the appearance of his most recent contribution.¹

The central argument of *Culture/Metaculture* may again be given in Mulhern's own words:

'Metaculture' names a modern discursive formation in which 'culture', however understood, speaks of its own generality and historical conditions of existence. Its inherent strategic impulse—failing which it would be no more than descriptive anthropology—is to mobilize 'culture' as a principle against the prevailing generality of 'politics' in the disputed plane of social authority. What speaks in metacultural discourse is the cultural principle itself, as it strives to dissolve the political as locus of general arbitration in social relations. Kulturkritik and Cultural Studies, typically contrasting in social attachment yet sharing this discursive template, have been strong versions of this metacultural will to authority.²

On this view, what has been conventionally understood as 'cultural criticism'—which Mulhern, with polemical intent, re-designates as 'Kulturkritik'—stands accused of attempting to 'mediate a symbolic metapolitical resolution of the contradictions of capitalist modernity'. Only something properly describable as 'politics' rather than any form of 'metapolitics' could achieve a real resolution of these contradictions. Metacultural discourse is an attempt to 'supplant the authority of

politics'; it 'dissolves the political'.³ The nub of his argument is condensed in this one phrase.

My first response, while warmly appreciative of the book's merits, raised objections on two fronts, historical and conceptual. I objected that Mulhern's tightly-defined category of 'Kulturkritik' could not, without distortion, embrace the wide range of intellectual figures to whom he wished to apply it. And I argued that Mulhern's own book, including its exhortation to practise a form of 'cultural politics', was itself a continuation of metacultural discourse, not a supersession of it, but that this was, in my view, no bad thing since to write from the perspective of culture does not, as Mulhern would have it, require an appeal to transcendentals: 'it only requires the presumption that disciplined reflection partly grounded in an extensive intellectual and aesthetic inheritance can furnish a place to stand in attempting to engage critically with the narrow pragmatism (or "specialism") of any particular political programme'.⁴

In his reply, 'Beyond Metaculture', Mulhern clarified and in some respects extended the argument of his book, particularly in relation to his category of 'Kulturkritik' and to the contrast he wishes to draw between the pernicious logic of all metacultural discourse and the legitimate enterprise of 'cultural politics'. He repeated that culture-as-principle asserts a 'claim to authority over the social whole' and thus that the attempt to displace politics was the 'inherent strategic impulse' of metacultural discourse. He characterized the role I had briefly sketched for cultural criticism as governed by the logic of 'the Arnoldian problematic' and hence vitiated by the incoherence present in all metacultural discourse. He further extended the reach of his category of 'Kulturkritik' by proposing that a Marxist version of it was to be found in the work of Adorno and Marcuse. He re-affirmed the contrast with 'politics' understood as the re-shaping of social patterns 'according to judgements based on a socially determinate programme and strategy'.⁵ (It should be said that since I had not taken issue with the discussion of Cultural Studies in Mulhern's book, that aspect of the

¹ Francis Mulhern, *Culture/Metaculture*, London 2000; Stefan Collini, 'Culture Talk', NLR 7, Jan–Feb 2001; Mulhern, 'Beyond Metaculture', NLR 16, July–Aug 2002; Collini, 'Defending Cultural Criticism', NLR 18, Nov–Dec 2002; Mulhern, 'What is Cultural Criticism?', NLR 23, Sept–Oct 2003.

² 'Beyond Metaculture', p. 86

³ *Culture/Metaculture*, pp. 169, 166.

⁴ 'Culture Talk', p. 51.

⁵ 'Beyond Metaculture', pp. 100, 86, 103.

argument, which may be thought its most interesting and original element, has rather fallen from view in our subsequent exchange.)

In 'Defending Cultural Criticism', I acknowledged the ways in which Mulhern had clarified and extended his case, but I found this later version more troubling than the original. In an attempt to isolate the issues at stake, I essayed this brief summary of our areas of agreement:

By this point, readers could be forgiven for feeling some frustration that Mulhern and I appear to agree on so much yet to differ on everything. We both insist on the non-identity of culture and politics; we both recognize politics as the important, inescapable, and difficult attempt to determine relations of power in a given space. We both have reservations about the extent to which so many on the left, especially the academic left, now treat questions of cultural identity, variously conceived, as the defining issues of politics. We both believe that those forms of criticism that seek to resolve the problems they diagnose simply by asserting the desirability or inevitability of some kind of harmony are indeed guilty of an evasion of politics. And we both seem drawn to a similar tone or writerly stance in discussing these matters, including a taste for certain kinds of intellectual irony. So, is there, in the end, any real difference between what he chooses to term 'cultural politics' and what I prefer to persist in calling 'cultural criticism'?

I elaborated on my objections to his now enlarged category of 'Kulturkritik' (on which more in a moment), and I asked whether for Mulhern there could be any 'cultural critics' who did *not* display the disabling failings of 'Kulturkritik' since it seems that for him public discourse belongs rightfully, and *exclusively*, to politics, while culture is always an intruder into this domain. I re-stated the familiar sense of 'cultural criticism', noting that in so doing I did 'not take myself to be saying anything particularly novel or to be staking out a distinctively personal position'. I again challenged the understanding of culture, influentially propounded by Raymond Williams, which sees it essentially as a compensatory projection of values excluded by the progress of 'capitalist modernity'. I urged that we do not have to understand culture in these functionalist, compensatory terms; that we should not attempt to make too clean or complete a division between 'culture' and 'society'; and that we do not need to regard *all* criticism of instrumental activity as presupposing or appealing to some 'transcendental realm'. I also urged that Mulhern's assertions *about* politics remain what he elsewhere calls 'metapolitics', indeed that what they offer might be described, applying his own phrase, as 'a symbolic metapolitical resolution of the contradictions of capitalist

modernity'. I concluded that 'speaking about broadly political matters from a broadly cultural perspective is both legitimate and likely to be of limited effect. It is only one among the valuable forms of public debate, and by no means always the most important one.'⁶

I. WHAT IS CULTURAL CRITICISM?

In his most recent contribution, 'What is Cultural Criticism?', Mulhern attempts to move the exchange into new territory. In particular, he engages with some of my writing from the past fifteen years or so on the assumption that it represents the intellectual practice whose legitimacy I have thus far been attempting to vindicate under the label of 'cultural criticism'. He detects in that writing a certain vacancy, an absence of 'specific commitments', a lack of 'substantive critical value'. Along the way, he generously identifies several positive qualities in my work, but in the end it, too, is assigned to his overarching category of 'metacultural discourse', though it lacks the 'metapolitical' ambition hitherto constitutive of that discourse, and as a result merely offers a 'quietist variation' of it. In my own practice, therefore, I am held to have exhibited the inadequacies that are inseparable from any appeal to 'culture' in the criticism of society.⁷

It will be no great surprise that I wish to take issue with this analysis at several points, but before dealing with what Mulhern does say in his latest response, it is worth remarking what he does not. First, he says nothing more about his construction of the historical category of 'Kulturkritik' and my criticisms of it: he is content, he declares, to let others 'weigh the arguments for themselves'. This seems intended to suggest a quiet confidence about the persuasiveness of his own arguments, as well, perhaps, as a weathered realism about the likely barrenness of further dispute. But in fact Mulhern cannot stand pat at this point since my objections, if not answered, are fatal for the viability of his larger argument.

Under this head I had pressed two different types of objection. The first was that this category is formulated at such a high level of abstraction, and at such a great remove from the idioms and concerns of those it

⁶ 'Defending Cultural Criticism', pp. 90, 74, 89, 97.

⁷ 'What is Cultural Criticism?', pp. 36, 43, 49.

is intended to embrace, that its use risks distorting rather than illuminating. A strikingly wide variety of figures—from Burke and Cobbett and Herder right through to Mann and Benda and Ortega, and on to Adorno and Marcuse and Orwell and Hoggart—are said to have ‘acted within a shared discursive order and subserved its governing logic’. But this ‘discursive order’ is not one that members of this alleged ‘tradition’ recognized themselves as sharing, and the alleged ‘governing logic’, while discernible in a few cases, appears marginal or non-existent in others. The definition of the category is drawn too tightly: something that could be suggestive if presented as a series of family resemblances becomes obstructively Procrustean when made subject to one governing logic. The upshot is to weaken rather than strengthen the persuasiveness of ‘Kulturkritik’ as a (re)organizing idea.

My second objection was that although Mulhern claimed to define this category in formal terms, he in fact made certain historically specific elements constitutive of it. In commenting on the novel use made of the category of ‘Kulturkritik’ in *Culture/Metaculture*, I wrote that ‘Mulhern makes European interwar cultural pessimism its defining moment, so that the appeal to “culture” has to be socially elitist, culturally alarmist, and politically conservative’.⁸ In his first reply, Mulhern denied this description, reiterating that the category was defined in formal terms and had no determinate political bearing. But as I suggested in return, the terms that he uses to characterize the thought of figures whom he discusses—‘authoritarian’, ‘aristocratic’, ‘regressive’—surely indicate ‘attitudes that most readers would recognize as broadly conservative in character’. Whatever positions the writers in question actually took in the politics of their time, assigning them to the tightly defined category of ‘Kulturkritik’ damns them for deploying a perspective that was ‘authoritarian in final effect’. Moreover, some of the supposedly ‘formal’ properties in question are actually substantive and historical: for example, one of the defining tropes Mulhern proffers is ‘modernity as disintegration’, where the culminating feature of modernity turns out to be ‘the rise of the masses’. The fact that this body of work was much given to identifying ‘climacterics’ and issuing a ‘general alert’ certainly seems to point towards my description of it as ‘alarmist’. And, from another angle, the fact that a figure such as Croce may be described as having ‘some formal affinity with Kulturkritik but perhaps no more

⁸ ‘Culture Talk’, p. 47.

substantial association' suggests that the category is not wholly defined in formal terms.⁹ In other words, Mulhern's transhistorical category of 'Kulturkritik' appears to be a generalization of features particularly to be found in the work of critics of 'mass society' in the interwar period, but only selectively or faintly present in those writing in other periods or with other concerns. No one would dispute that several of these features are to be found in the cultural criticism of such figures as Thomas Mann or F. R. Leavis, to whom Mulhern returns with what I find to be a revealing frequency, but his deployment of the category allows him to tar all previous and subsequent cultural critics (now including me, it seems) with the same brush.

The unsustainable imperialism of his proposed new category can be indicated in a further way. *Culture/Metaculture*, the book in which Mulhern announces his category and sets it to work in re-organizing our understanding of twentieth-century intellectual history, draws on, and in places largely reprints, material from earlier essays. This is a common and unexceptionable practice (I am in no position to disapprove), but what is revealing in this case is that several passages have been reproduced more or less verbatim except that 'Kulturkritik' has now been silently substituted for a variety of interestingly different earlier terms. For example, in the later book he accounts for the lack of proper recognition of 'working-class self-organization in politics' in Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* in terms of 'the spontaneous perceptual effect of the convention that framed his analysis: that of Kulturkritik'. The same wording occurs in the earlier essay save only that there the culprit is named as 'cultural criticism'. Or again, the later book speaks of Williams establishing 'the irreducible distance between Kulturkritik in all its variants—reactionary or reforming—and an integrally socialist politics of culture'. The same phrase occurs in the earlier essay except that 'cultural liberalism' takes the place of 'Kulturkritik'. Or, finally, when Mulhern allows himself to register a rare note of reservation about Williams's work, he says of *Culture and Society* that its title concepts 'seemed often to exert reflexive control over his own discourse, deflecting his analytic and evaluative priorities away from political reason proper towards a "higher", finally "common" moral ground—the familiar orientation of Kulturkritik'. The phrasing in the original essay again displayed a revealing change: '... reflexive control over his own discourse, inflecting his analytic and evaluative priorities towards a typically

⁹ 'Defending Cultural Criticism', pp. 76–81.

"humanist" derogation of political reason, with correlative intimations of a finally "common" moral interest.¹⁰ 'Cultural criticism', 'cultural liberalism', 'humanism'—whatever these disputed terms are taken to mean, they are far from identical. 'Kulturkritik', in Mulhern's new usage, elides distinctions in the present as well as the past in order to underwrite a polemical claim about 'political reason': this is surely the chief argument that readers will have to weigh for themselves.

The elimination of cultural criticism

This leads on to the second and larger matter that Mulhern does not address in his latest response. He begins by asking 'what is the substance of the position' I wish to defend, and proffers an answer by means of 'an outline of [my] cultural criticism' as expressed in some of my more recent writing. I shall return in a moment to the hasty assumption that the position I have been defending thus far in this exchange must be represented by my own practice—indeed, that the defence of that practice is the unavowed impulse behind my general argument. But what is most striking about this tactic is that it makes no acknowledgment of the fact that the polemical thrust of Mulhern's initial position, as set out in *Culture/Metaculture* and defended in his subsequent essay, was to deny the possibility of any legitimate form of cultural criticism and to propose to replace it with his own version of 'cultural politics'. My earlier contributions did indeed involve a 'defence' of the possibility of a legitimate form of cultural criticism, but precisely because a defence seemed called for in the face of his attack. Again I offered a series of arguments against the sweepiness of his initial claims, but again his most recent contribution does not attempt to respond to these objections. It is important, therefore, to restate the nub of this disagreement before we can proceed to judge whether the remarks he makes about some of my other writings are to the point.

As we have just seen, Mulhern has for some time been training his sights on what he called the 'typically "humanist" derogation of political reason'.

¹⁰ *Culture/Metaculture*, pp. 59, 72, 67; cf. *The Present Lasts a Long Time: Essays in Cultural Politics*, Cork 1998, pp. 122, 130, 127. The next sentence after this last passage speaks of *Culture and Society* as Williams's 'revaluation of English Kulturkritik' where the original had spoken of 'revaluation of English cultural criticism', and so on. As I noted in 'Culture Talk', p. 45, the relevant essay, 'A welfare culture? Hoggart and Williams in the fifties', appeared first in *Radical Philosophy* in 1996 and was then reprinted in *Present* before being extensively re-used in *Culture/Metaculture*.

Here, the scare-quotes are the typographical expression of the curled lip, set against the almost Kantian grandeur bestowed by speaking of ‘political reason’ rather than simply ‘politics’. Expanding the range of targets in his recent book, he attacked what he described as ‘the utopian impulse, common to the old cultural criticism and the new cultural studies, to resolve the tension of the relationship between culture and politics by dissolving political reason itself’.¹² In response, I disputed this claim, not least because it seemed to propose a restrictive and tendentious understanding of ‘the old cultural criticism’. I restated a fairly conventional understanding of that activity (hence my insistence that the position I was occupying was neither novel nor distinctively personal), an activity in which the intellectual and aesthetic practices loosely denominated as ‘culture’ provide a series of resources or perspectives from which to engage in the criticism of society, including its largely instrumental activities, as well as criticism of the work of other critics. Mulhern has still not established that this must, in principle, be an illegitimate activity.

I had said that this was the sense ‘associated, in Britain, with aspects of the work of figures such as Matthew Arnold, T. S. Eliot, George Orwell, Richard Hoggart, and so on’.¹³ In his most recent piece, Mulhern immediately begins by summarizing my account and then saying, having quoted this illustrative list: ‘This is recognizable as a self-description (except in its evocation of Eliot, whom I for one would not have thought to associate with Collini’s critical journalism).’¹⁴ What strikes me here is not the assumption that I have all along been offering a covert defence of my own critical practice, but the suggestion that Eliot’s name is somehow out of place in the list, that he is too unlike the others mentioned—perhaps on account of his provokingly reactionary views? This is the first place (more are to come) where I sense that Mulhern naturally tends to assume that an activity or tradition presupposes substantive agreement. If I *had* been offering, with extreme presumption, a sly self-description in the passage in question, I would not have found Eliot’s inclusion incongruous, however much I might recoil from some of his unappealing political stances and social attitudes. The truth surely is that anyone drawing up a short shortlist of names illustrative of the genre of cultural criticism in twentieth-century Britain would be likely to include Eliot, without thereby identifying with or endorsing his (or any of the other names’) practice of the activity.

¹² *Culture/Metaculture*, pp. xx–xxi; ‘Beyond Metaculture’, p. 86.

¹³ ‘Defending Cultural Criticism’, p. 74. ¹⁴ ‘What is Cultural Criticism?’, p. 36.

A similar problem surfaces when Mulhern, in the course of disputing the coherence of the sense of 'cultural criticism' I have invoked, juxtaposes T. S. Eliot, Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart as 'three reflective, critically distant contributions to postwar discussion of culture and society', and then concludes, with the air of a prosecuting counsel who has just clinched his case: 'They all meet Collini's minimum criteria for cultural criticism, and they are mutually incompatible'.¹⁴ Well, if 'incompatible' means they exhibit or champion different intellectual styles and political values, then they are indeed 'incompatible', but that doesn't make them any the less practitioners of forms of cultural criticism. To say that the formal characteristics I had mentioned, such as distance, reflectiveness, and generality, do not enable us to 'set about discriminating among' these three writers is not an objection to characterizing cultural criticism partly in these general terms. Of course there would be other features and other values in terms of which one could discriminate among them; the three characteristics mentioned could never be supposed to be all that one would bring to reading them. In almost any field writers and thinkers can be classified as engaged in a common activity while holding wildly divergent views about aspects of its subject-matter. There is no damaging case to be answered here.

Culture, again

I have to confess that I am not sure if there is a case to be answered with respect to Mulhern's paragraphs on the different senses of 'culture'. I am owning up to a genuine difficulty of understanding here, not essaying a lofty put down, but the paragraphs in question are highly condensed and not easy to interpret. I take Mulhern to be saying that even the conventional sense of 'culture' which I invoked is now so shot through with theoretical contention as to render incoherent any idea of the critic appealing to and speaking from its perspectives and values. Either it tacitly lays claim to an unsustainable superiority over the world of non-culture, requiring some version of Arnold's 'best self' to validate the position from which it speaks, or else, re-thought as an aspect of 'the relations between elements in a whole way of life', it loses any independent standing vis-à-vis 'the divided historical world of sense'. I repudiated the former position, without, allegedly, properly appreciating how the latter understanding undercuts the possibility of

¹⁴ 'What is Cultural Criticism?', p. 39.

criticism being furnished by 'culture' with an enabling perspective or set of resources, since art and ideas themselves, thus understood, will tend to operate 'within the space of the ideological dominant'. To support this, he cites Williams's analysis, in *Culture and Society*, of the mid-nineteenth-century industrial novel 'in which strong, eloquent witness to the reality of working-class suffering coexisted, imaginatively, with an ungovernable fear of mass irrationality', and he goes on to argue that even when literature takes culture itself as its material, it is still subject to 'such disturbance of vision'.¹⁵

As can sometimes happen with briskly handled historical instances, the chosen example here appears rather to call the main argument into question than to support it. To speak of these novels suffering from 'disturbance of vision' implies possession of the clear or undisturbed vision that they might have manifested had it not been for the pressure exerted by 'the ideological dominant'. But does that correct, undisturbed vision thus escape 'the divided historical world of sense'? If it does, then the general form of the objection seems null: if Engels can have access to such vision then so, in principle, can Mrs Gaskell. But if it doesn't so escape, then the general objection is null for the opposite reason: being part of 'the divided historical world of sense' does not necessarily prevent writers from arriving at a penetratingly critical grasp of aspects of the society in which they live. This latter proposition seems to me broadly true and borne out by frequent historical example (which is one reason why the notion of 'the ideological dominant' always threatens to over-reach itself). But in that case, the practitioners of 'cultural criticism' and 'cultural politics' are in exactly the same boat: neither group has, nor needs, access to some privileged source of 'undisturbed' vision; both manage to fashion criticisms of contemporary society out of the materials to hand.

In discussing Mulhern's example I have left aside the question of whether one should expect a *novel* to offer a single, unambiguous, analysis of a given social issue; perhaps the 'imaginative coexistence' of different planes or registers of experience is part of what we find distinctive and distinctively valuable about fiction. But the fact that, in offering his example, Mulhern himself does not seem at all troubled by this thought suggests to me a possible interpretation of his more abstract—and, to my eye, somewhat more opaque—general statements about 'culture'.

¹⁵ 'What is Cultural Criticism?', pp. 38–9.

In talking about the extended, more anthropological, notion of 'culture' favoured in the later work of Williams and the style of cultural studies claiming descent from it, Mulhern observes that literature and philosophy persist as part of 'the social relations of meaning as a whole', and then he adds: 'Were it not so, the new concept of culture would simply invert the dualism of the old'. But what is this 'dualism' and in what sense does the allegedly new concept of culture not share in it, whatever it is? Here is where I feel most uncertain in my reading of Mulhern, but the charge of dualism (it is clearly intended as a charge) seems to rest on the assumption that the cultural critic takes literature and ideas to be somehow apart from or above society, and hence reifies culture as—in the term with which Williams critically summarized the outcome of the history he surveyed—'an abstraction and an absolute'. I would remark in passing that it is not obvious to me that all the figures whom Williams discussed did reify culture in this way, but in any event there is no reason whatever to assume that the contemporary cultural critic *must* do so. Of course cultural activities are 'part of society'; all human activities are 'part of society' (what else could they be part of?), including the activities of 'seeking to determine the shape of social relations as a whole in a given space'. To speak of 'culture' as, for certain purposes, distinguishable from 'society' is no more to be the prisoner of a disabling 'dualism' than it is to speak of 'politics' as, for certain purposes, distinguishable from 'society'. In the course of their writing, any writer establishes, both propositionally and symptomatically, how alert they are to the element of arbitrary convention involved in such categories. But, handled with the requisite self-consciousness, 'culture' is as useful and legitimate a term in this context as is 'politics'.

Following the sequence of Mulhern's most recent response, a very brief exegetical digression is required here. I had remarked that in much of the literature on this topic, as in this exchange itself, 'politics' tended to be used with two different emphases. There was what I called 'the conventional, newspaper reader's sense—the everyday doings of politicians, parties, and parliaments'; and there was the 'more elevated' sense, 'the attempt to order social relations in the light of conceptions of human possibility'.¹⁶ Mulhern's invocation of 'political reason itself' clearly shares this second emphasis; the disparaging remarks by some cultural critics about 'the routine reproduction of controversies or competitive interests' just as clearly partake of the first (Raymond Williams helpfully

¹⁶ 'Defending Cultural Criticism', pp. 86–7.

provides the illustrative phrase in this case). Mulhern berates me for appealing to 'the authority' of the newspaper reader, and then proceeds to read me a long, unnecessary, sermon on the way large issues about contrasting visions of human society suffuse everyday newspaper reports, something especially visible at times of heightened conflict, such as Weimar Germany or, in a different way, Thatcher's Britain. Indeed so: it is hard to imagine anyone ever wanting to deny that. But it was surely clear that I was not *appealing* to 'the authority' of the newspaper reader, whatever that would be; I was simply using a familiar piece of shorthand. I was not trying to introduce some new piece of conceptual machinery here, merely remarking a movement between emphases, a movement which has been remarked before but which, if not attended to, fosters confusion about the level of discourse or activity in question. A critic may reasonably call attention to instances of short-termism, careerism and cynicism in aspects of contemporary political life without thereby being guilty of attempting 'to dissolve political reason itself'.

Varieties of criticism

In my earlier contribution, I observed that the question at issue is obviously closely bound up with ways of understanding the role of 'the intellectual'. In response, Mulhern offers us two alternatives. There is the 'corporatist' conception: 'intellectuals are in principle a cohesive social group, bonded morally in a commitment to universals by virtue of which they pass judgement on the world'. Set over against this is a more modest conception which recognizes that 'the characteristic practice of intellectuals is one modality of intervention among others in the contested field of social relations'; 'intellectuals make their choices from a range of historical possibilities that they share with everyone'. He correctly surmises that the first of these alternatives is 'not an option' for me, but he also suspects that the second accords the intellectual even less 'status' than I would wish to do, since (I extrapolate from his other remarks) it reserves no distinctive content for 'culture' in the name of which I see the intellectual as speaking.¹⁷

I have to begin by saying that I would not choose to work within this binary pairing, but I do not, in fact, want to reserve any special status for intellectuals. That term has come to be principally applied to those who,

¹⁷ 'What is Cultural Criticism?', pp. 42–3.

from a basis in some creative, scholarly, or other cultural achievement, address a non-specialist audience on matters of general concern. That is, in Mulhern's terms, their distinctive 'modality of intervention', but it is distinctive enough for the purpose and is different from 'intervening' on the basis of, say, one's commercial or legal role. But while this may still seem to Mulhern to be claiming too much for the activity of intellectuals, it also seems to him to be claiming too little. 'If intellectual practice is really so modestly specified, after all, what position can it sustain?'¹⁸ But what does 'position' refer to here? Intellectual practice is intellectual practice, modestly specified or not (and if there is to be a choice, then a little modesty in such matters seems more appealing than its opposite). There's no great mystery about it, nor about the ways in which one might draw upon its protocols in criticizing contemporary society. What 'position' *may* mean, as indicated by Mulhern's reference in the previous paragraph to the 'social grounding' of 'universals', is a set of views which endorse or promote the interests of a particular social class. But to ask for 'universals' would already be one contestable move; to assume they only have any validity when 'socially grounded' in this way would be another (and saying this is not to be committed to 'Idealism'). It is part of my overall case that one does not *have* to speak in these terms.

It is, presumably, largely for this reason that Mulhern claims to detect a kind of vacancy or absence at the heart of my writing in this area. 'This reduced idea of the intellectual, like the abstract "perspective of culture" with which he [Collini] now very plausibly associates it, is a piece of algebra: y to the other's x , it is a cipher awaiting its substantive critical value'.¹⁹ Clearly, something about my writing frustrates and irritates Mulhern, but this expression of his frustration does not advance the argument. Any 'idea of the intellectual' will be principally a characterization of a relation—a relation between a public, a medium, an occasion, a reputation and so on. It can obviously not be specified in terms of expressing only one kind of view, nor is a commentator, in analysing 'the idea of the intellectual', thereby endorsing one kind of view over others.

Mulhern is sufficiently pleased with the conceit of 'algebra' to repeat it, as when he lists several things which I, as an intellectual historian, am interested in, such as manner, tone, temper and so on, and comments: 'So the algebraic series continues'.²⁰ But are such matters really

¹⁸ 'What is Cultural Criticism?', p. 43.

¹⁹ 'What is Cultural Criticism?', p. 43.

²⁰ 'What is Cultural Criticism?', p. 44.

such an empty notational code, a 'deferral of 'substance'? Differences of temper, for example, are not just among the most interesting differences distinguishing human beings from each other; they may be highly consequential as well, and to attend to those differences is not necessarily to withdraw one's attention from a public to a private sphere. The 'substance', against which such empty algebra is contrasted, seems to be provided by differences of 'political evaluation', the deliverances of 'political reason itself'. But these are the phrases which seem vulnerable, if any are, to the charges of 'vacancy' and the deferral of substance. Here we seem to be in that topsy-turvy world in which proclaiming one's general allegiance to some supposed direction of world history counts as 'substantive', whereas offering some individual characterization or detailed critical discrimination is derogated as mere 'algebra'. And this returns us to the question of why '*political evaluation*' should automatically be thought to trump all other kinds: sometimes it quite properly does and sometimes, surely, it does not.

2. DOING CULTURAL CRITICISM

The greater part of Mulhern's most recent essay is given over to an extended critique of some of my writing during the past couple of decades. I should say immediately that, flattering though this critique is in some ways, it strikes me as largely irrelevant to the matter in hand. In trying to reinstate the possibility of some legitimate form of cultural criticism, in the face of its elimination in Mulhern's conceptual scheme, I did not intend to be justifying any practice of my own. The case was made in general terms because it was a general possibility whose legitimacy had been called into question. However, since Mulhern has now proceeded in this way, and since he clearly believes that his critical observations on my writing do serve to discredit the case for cultural criticism more generally, I shall try to respond to his criticisms, aware of the perils of self-justification and the kinds of intellectual egotism to which it can lead.

I should begin by declaring that I do not think of myself as having been a 'cultural critic' with a consistent and distinctive practice, not least because very little of what I have written until quite recently would have any claim to be regarded as 'cultural criticism' in the first place. For many years all of my work, and even now the larger part of it, has been

recognizable as a contribution to intellectual history, pursued in a scholarly and (as it has seemed to some readers) rather austere mode. For several years, now, it is true, I have also written occasional pieces that attempt to address a wider, non-specialist readership, though I am not sure whether these pieces, most of which have taken the form of review-essays, count as even minor contributions to the activity of 'cultural criticism' as that term has conventionally been understood. More generally, my intellectual development has been slow and uneven, making me less confident and less settled about the direction of my thinking than Mulhern himself seems to have been from a comparatively early stage. One or two of the cited examples of my work, especially from some time ago, all too visibly bear the marks of someone trying to find his way.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, in addressing aspects of nineteenth-century British intellectual history that also figured as part of the subject-matter of the sub-fields of the history of the social sciences and the history of political thought, I was particularly concerned to try to rescue the quidity of past historical agents from the schematizing and present-minded treatment they often received from social scientists and political theorists raiding the past to support some contemporary theoretical position. I have since come to see that *Public Moralists* (completed in 1990 and drawing on material from the previous decade) would have been a better book if I had not allowed a desire to escape from under the shadow of the 'history of political theory' to shape my mode of address in places, and Mulhern is justified in detecting an irritable insistence in some of my more sweeping remarks from that period about the coerciveness of 'doctrines' and 'theories'.

Nonetheless, even in my own case I acknowledge the truth of Dr Johnson's observation that 'he who writes much will not easily escape a manner, such a recurrence of particular modes as may be easily noted',²¹ and I recognize some of the continuities in manner and mode to which Mulhern draws attention. But the larger case, which he prosecutes with no little forensic zeal, simply does not stand up. Mulhern is, needless to say, under no obligation to give a comprehensive and proportioned account of my work, but since he furnishes several summary characterizations of it and then uses those characterizations to criticize or discredit the activity of cultural criticism more generally, it seems necessary to

²¹ Samuel Johnson, 'The Life of Dryden', *Lives of the Poets*, (1779–81), quoted in Christopher Ricks, *Allusion to the Poets*, Oxford 2002, p. 42.

point out at least some of the ways in which his reading of me risks being tendentious or culpably selective.

Back to Arnold?

Mulhern makes much of my handling of particular figures, such as Matthew Arnold, Richard Hoggart and Christopher Hitchens, so let me take each case in turn. The chief reservation I have about his discussion of my writing on Matthew Arnold, a reservation I should like to think any reader of that writing would share, is that it rests on a too-ready identification of author and subject. It is clearly the case that there are aspects of Arnold's writing that I find winning, and in the Preface to my brief 'Past Masters' volume I explained why, writing on that subject at that moment in that format, I had chosen to present a portrait that some might consider 'culpably indulgent'. But sympathetic re-creation does not entail endorsement. Indeed, in the concluding chapter I made clear that I am not one of Arnold's 'most devoted champions', and I hoped the book had indicated some of the ways in which I thought him 'most liable to criticism'.²² Mulhern nonetheless persists in reading me as 'not far apart' from Arnold on various crucial matters, concluding from one passage in my exposition that, 'if the free indirect style allows a confident reading', I am not speaking 'at any significant distance' from the views I am describing.²³ I am surprised that anyone trained in literary criticism, as Mulhern was, should so confidently identify me with views reported through this particular literary strategy. This general case is then buttressed by what seem to me misreadings of particular passages. For example, he cites my speaking of Arnold's 'deep intellectual affinity' with Platonism which I took as one indication of 'what might be described as the "anti-political" character of his thought'. Mulhern reads this as straightforward endorsement on my part, though I would have thought the original text was sufficiently clear on the matter. In the paragraph from which Mulhern quotes, I say: 'Arnold was temperamentally something of a Platonist, with all the Platonist's vulnerability to being dazzled by the beauty of his own ideals to the neglect of their abuse in practice'. I go on to say in the immediately succeeding paragraph: 'No-one with such a strong aversion to conflict as Arnold came to manifest could be an altogether satisfactory writer on politics'.²⁴ I cannot see how these sentences could be read as other than criticisms, criticisms

²² *Arnold*, Oxford 1988, pp. vii, 117.

²³ 'What is Cultural Criticism?', p. 41.

²⁴ *Arnold*, pp. 91–2.

which emphasize the limitations of ‘the “anti-political” character of his thought’ and which surely signal a more than temporal distance separating historical author and modern commentator.

Since Mulhern has already paid me the compliment of reading several things that I have written, it may seem ungracious on my part to reproach him with not reading more, but given that he makes so much of my supposed identification with Arnold’s views, I think he should feel obliged to take into account the explicit reflections on this issue that appear in the ‘Afterword’ to the Clarendon Press re-issue of the ‘Past Masters’ volume.²⁵ Although I there acknowledged that in the first edition I may have been naive in not anticipating how reductively my sympathetic portrait of Arnold could be construed, I reiterated, in pretty plain terms, my sense of distance from not just his ‘severest detractors’ but his ‘zealous champions’ as well: ‘I have no wish to defend all of Arnold’s particular judgements or tastes . . . Similarly, the notion of trying to “imitate” Arnold’s performance seems to me fundamentally misguided, only capable, even at its best, of yielding wilful anachronism and mannered pastiche’. And I singled out for criticism those modern readers who do attempt to endorse Arnold in the way Mulhern objects to: ‘I have no sympathy with the . . . appropriation of this particular Victorian writer to add a historical veneer to an intransigent anti-modernism.’²⁶

Mulhern himself, of course, is not prey to any incriminating sympathy or even ambivalence on the subject: ‘bourgeois society defined Arnold’s imaginative horizon’. He immediately moves to what he takes to be the telling contrast: ‘Marx saw in the same society the conditions of a qualitatively superior collective life beyond it, to be achieved by political means’. Mulhern is confident in these ascriptions; he is confident that they are the only real choices; and he is confident that this divide is what matters above all others. He and I must accordingly be slotted into this template; he knows where he stands, and now he feels reasonably confident he has put me in my box, too.

The niceties of my relation to the work of Matthew Arnold (or of any other historical figure) are not, I suspect, of very wide interest, but it seemed important to pause on this example because it exhibits a recurring feature of Mulhern’s case. I sense in his most recent essay an

²⁵ ‘Afterword’ in *Matthew Arnold: a Critical Portrait*, Oxford 1994, pp. 125–38.

²⁶ *Matthew Arnold*, pp. 134, 137, 131–2.

insistent urge to classify and label me. As in his previous contribution, one of the ways he attempts to do this is by establishing what he takes to be my preferred historical affiliations, but he consistently over-reads these and finds political endorsement where there is only imaginative sympathy. This accounts for his disproportionately frequent return to my supposed alignment of myself with Richard Hoggart. One reason this seems to me disproportionate (in a way that his case about Arnold, whatever its other defects, does not), is that I have only ever published half of one essay about Hoggart, a piece that began as a review of one of his later books, *Townscape with Figures*. I clearly found that an interesting book, and I used it to illustrate what I took to be certain admirable and attractive features in the personal ethos of Hoggart's writing more generally.²⁷ But I have never attempted any thorough discussion of his work or even given parts of it the kind of close analytical scrutiny I have devoted to, say, Eliot, Leavis, or Williams. The truth is that Hoggart figures much more substantially in Mulhern's work than in mine and is for him an important negative reference point.²⁸ I suspect I may be partly to blame for his reading a little too much into my brief discussion, because in revising it for re-publication I made it one half of a diptych in which I contrasted Hoggart with Raymond Williams, especially in terms of their styles as *writers*, where the balance of judgement seems to me to favour Hoggart. This is obviously not all I would say about either of them from other points of view, especially Williams, but Mulhern reads it as a defining declaration of allegiance.

Huntin' with Hitchens?

The single piece of my writing which Mulhern subjects to the most extended scrutiny is a review-essay on Christopher Hitchens's *Orwell's Victory*, which appeared in the *London Review of Books* last year.²⁹ The

²⁷ Reprinted in *English Pasts. Essays in History and Culture*, Oxford 1999, pp. 219–30. I should say, in case any significance could be thought to attach to my not saying, that I subsequently met and got to know Hoggart a little, and also that he later wrote a measured but largely positive review of *English Pasts*.

²⁸ See, for example, his essay 'A welfare culture?', reproduced in *The Present Lasts a Long Time*, and the sections of *Culture/Metaculture* entitled 'Hoggart and the abuses of literacy', 'Literature and contemporary cultural studies', and 'From Hoggart to Stuart Hall'.

²⁹ "No Bullshit" Bullshit", *London Review of Books*, 23 January 2003; since Mulhern notes that 'Hitchens rather than Orwell is indeed the subject', I should perhaps record that this was at the request of the editors of the *LRB*.

burden of his objection here appears to be that I remain too close to my subject both stylistically and in cultural reference. Noting that the idea of 'company' crops up several times, especially in the piece's closing vignette, he finds me altogether too 'convivial', though after re-reading my piece I have to say that Mulhern must have a more bracing and strenuous sense of 'conviviality' than I do. But the force of his objection rests, yet again, on what I do not do, or do not do sufficiently emphatically. Above all, he notes I only make one reference to 'Hitchens's support for Bush's wars of aggression' and that I do so in wording that is said to 'ease readers past the political crisis to which it alludes'. The phrase in question—about Hitchens's position on the invasion of Iraq putting him in 'some very unlovely company'—may itself be thought too oblique or even arch, but yet again I would have to say that an essayist has to be allowed some choice about his point of access to a topic and his mode of address. 'Hitchens's support for Bush's wars of aggression' is certainly one legitimate topic, but it is not the only one; in this case, it also happened to be one that several other writers had already written about. I see no reason to regard it as the key or the ultimate destination of all of Hitchens's writing, or as somehow more central than the features of that writing which I do discuss. Yet again, we seem to be back with the overriding status Mulhern ascribes to political affiliation understood in elemental friend–foe terms. Commenting on the concluding paragraph of my piece, he complains that 'the burden of [my] judgement remains . . . not fully public in the expected way'.³⁰ It is not clear to me who is doing the expecting here, but my sense of the readers of the *LRB* is that they are a sophisticated and diverse lot, well able to appreciate the burden of judgement even of a piece liberally salted with 'high-spirited irony'.

Generalizing from this example to the limitations of my cultural criticism as a whole, Mulhern declares: 'This is criticism as home truths. Home truths have force but little scope.'³¹ But surely the point about 'home truths' is that they have precisely the scope that is appropriate to the occasion: that is what makes them effective. Here, and not for the first time, I find myself wondering what kind of effectiveness Mulhern, were he to have been writing in that paper on that occasion, would feel was desirable and attainable. In any event, the kind of 'scope' he finds lacking in my criticism is suggested by his immediately passing, in the

³⁰ 'What is Cultural Criticism?', p. 47. ³¹ 'What is Cultural Criticism?', p. 47.

same paragraph, to the question of the possibility of the ‘transformation’ of ‘the social relations of capitalism’, and he in effect reproves me for not conducting my examination of Hitchens by the light of an explicit declaration of where I stand on this. But I trust I have by now made clear why I do not share his sense of the constant obligatoriness of that exercise.

Scarcely political?

More generally, I hope I have also made clear that I do not accept the terms in which Mulhern no less constantly draws a contrast between ‘real’ or ‘substantive commitments’ and the matters of voice, tone, perspective and so on that much of my writing has focused on. The universal applicability and usefulness of a distinction framed in these terms is part of what is at issue between us. But even according to Mulhern’s preferred conceptual vocabulary, it has to be said that he does not properly acknowledge, or give the reader an adequate sense of, the place that such ‘substantive commitments’ do have in my writing. My alleged failings in this respect are summed up in summary fashion indeed: ‘The terms of evaluation that he brings to public discourse are scarcely political, even where politics is the matter in hand’.³² It is, of course, possible that Mulhern is working with an esoteric and hard-to-measure-up-to sense of what is to count as ‘political’ here, but I fear that he may just be exaggerating a fair comment on some parts of my work into a false generalization about the whole of it.

For brevity’s sake, let me confine my counter-examples to those available in the sources he himself makes use of, the kind of essay collected in *English Past*s and the kind of essay recently published in the *London Review of Books*. Thus, writing in the former about the Tory Party’s appeal to ‘Victorian values’ in the 1980s, I hardly hid my hostility to ‘policies that manifestly make the rich richer and the poor poorer’, or my support for those measures from earlier in the century that ‘had, until the 1980s, made Britain a less horrible country to be poor in’, or more generally my disdain for ‘the gutter individualism of the 1980s and 1990s’.³³ Since Mulhern rests so much of his case on a piece from the *LRB* that was

³² ‘What is Cultural Criticism?’, p. 48. I leave aside, as an uncharacteristically cheap shot that stands self-condemned, his jibe that my style of cultural criticism is ‘at one with the times’ in being ‘another kind of privatization’

³³ *English Past*s, pp. 106, 110, 114

allegedly characteristic of my writing in avoiding ‘political’ terms of evaluation, perhaps I may quote at some length from a slightly earlier essay in those pages. Thus, when writing about the fantasy of ‘England’ promoted by Roger Scruton, whom I characterized as ‘a born-again Tory ideologue masquerading as a once-born countryman’, I spoke of his evasion of the fact that ‘those who control great concentrations of wealth can systematically determine the life-chances of the many who do not’, and went on: ‘At such moments, all this sub-Waugh attitudinising ceases to seem amiably harmless, and falls into place as part of a wider cultural tendency whose effect is to distract our attention from what “the experience of class” is actually about.’ And at the end of the essay, I offered some more general thoughts that do not, on re-reading, seem chiefly distinguished by their avoidance of political terms of evaluation:

For the fact is that the unsleeping destructive energy of capital seeking to maximise its returns is not going to be tamed by a spot of huntin’, shootin’, and fishin’. It is not going to be tamed by a spot of Anglicanism, either, or any other prettied-up form of ‘re-enchantment’. It might, possibly, be tamed by a spot of Socialism.

I then concluded: ‘And this, surely, is the disabling paradox of modern “conservatism”, namely that it wants simultaneously to liberate market forces and to lament the effects of market forces. Hence the deep structural dilemma of the modern Tory social critic: the forces that are destroying all that he loves are the forces he is ideologically committed to supporting.’³⁴ I would have thought there was enough ‘political evaluation’ here to satisfy even Mulhern. But it is perfectly true that I don’t think this is *always* what needs saying—and so on such occasions I don’t say it.

It may also be to the point to mention a more recent piece anatomizing the assumptions informing current New Labour policy on universities—to the point because although it appeared too late for Mulhern to have taken it into account, its concerns and critical intent are continuous with those in a couple of pieces published in the 1980s on higher education policy which are included in *English Pasts*.³⁵ I trust the terms in which I analyse public discourse here could not be

³⁴ ‘Hegel in green wellies’, *London Review of Books*, 8 January 2001 (reviewing Roger Scruton, *England: An Elegy*, London 2000, and Kenneth Baker, ed., *The Faber Book of Landscape Poetry*, London 2000).

³⁵ ‘HuEdBiz’, *London Review of Books*, 6 November 2003.

stigmatized as ‘scarcely political’. Of course, Mulhern may, like any other reader, have objections to or reservations about the piece, but I hope it may serve as an example of one form of cultural criticism which engages with a pressing contemporary issue without tending, even implicitly, to authoritarianism or nostalgia.

Mulhern concludes his assessment of my work with a most curious closing paragraph. He writes that I insist that my intellectual practice (which I had not actually been writing about) ‘is none the worse for not being “politics”, leaving at least one reader to wonder who has been maintaining the contrary position’.¹⁶ This is disingenuous in the extreme: our whole exchange has pivoted around Mulhern’s indictment of cultural criticism, as part of ‘metacultural discourse’, for its ‘inherent’ impulse to ‘displace politics, dissolve political reason itself’. But this, he says, is not the issue where my ‘intellectual practice’ is concerned (though it is he who has concerned it): ‘No, the simple question is how far it reaches *as criticism*, and how consequentially. The answer as I see it is not very.’ Expressed in a more sympathetic spirit, this would be to raise a very interesting, if in some ways intractable, question about any criticism, mine (for what it is worth) included. How do we judge the reach and impact of criticism? ‘Reach’ here is presumably intellectual as well as social, with the implication that since my criticism doesn’t reach much beyond matters of voice and temperament, it is hardly surprising that it is ineffective in changing society. Well, I certainly wouldn’t want to make any large claims for the effectiveness of what I write, but I can’t help wondering a bit about the presumed effectiveness of other modes. May it not be that offering a reasonably wide and heterogeneous range of readers some prompts to re-examining what they think they know has a claim to being as ‘effective’, in its own way, as advancing a set of theoretical claims, couched at a high level of abstraction, to a small and largely converted set of readers? I wouldn’t myself want to give priority to any one measure of effectiveness or to dismiss any of these forms of criticism out of hand, but the comparison leaves me thinking that each form has its own distinctive limitations when it comes to reach and effectiveness.

But I, apparently, ‘affiliate’ my work to ‘English cultural liberalism’, a tradition whose record ‘has been variable in this decisive respect’. The

¹⁶ ‘What is Cultural Criticism?’, p. 48.

decisive respect, remember, is 'how far it reaches *as criticism*, and how consequentially'. In a revealing move, Mulhern suggests that in fact not all criticism in this manner has been as inconsequential as mine has. For example:

Leavis based his assessments of the contemporary situation on a strong theory of historical modernity, from which he also derived the strategy and tactics of a cultural politics. That the theory was false and the politics desperate—and, increasingly, reactionary—is not the whole point his critical practice was decided, biting, and, for many, an inspiration.⁷⁷

The rhetorical emphasis here may seem to suggest that it is more important to *have* a 'theory' and to *have* a 'politics', even if they are false, desperate and reactionary, than it is to try to conduct one's 'assessments of the contemporary situation' (insofar as that is what one wishes to address, which it is not always) in more accurate and discriminating but acknowledgedly piecemeal and incomplete ways. Leavis's 'strong theory of historical modernity' was, as Mulhern knows better than anyone, an eclectic amalgam of nostalgia, prejudice and moral austerity, interspersed with some perceptive observations about the changing shapes of an 'educated reading public'. Neither Leavis's nor anyone else's assessments of the contemporary situation were made more probing or more analytical for being based on the historical fantasy of a lost 'organic community'. (It is incidentally interesting to see that, since he is being cited with some measure of approval on this occasion, Leavis is allowed to have practised a 'cultural politics', though normally he figures in Mulhern's indictment of the 'Kulturkritik' tradition as an exponent of 'cultural criticism'.) The passage also sheds an interesting light on Mulhern's recurrent engagement with Leavis during the past twenty-five years. It suggests he sees him as an opponent worth attending to, partly because one can respect the moral strenuousness of his hostility to 'technologico-Benthamite civilization', and partly because, by attempting to develop a 'theory of historical modernity' and to derive a 'cultural politics' from it, Leavis could be regarded as making explicit what was merely presumed by more implicit or evasive forms of 'cultural liberalism'. Demolishing the 'false' theory and the 'desperate' politics is then not only invitingly easy, but it can also claim to be a telling and representative victory.

⁷⁷ 'What is Cultural Criticism?', pp. 48–9.

As it happens, I, too, have a long-standing interest in, and not a little respect for, Leavis, at least for his early literary criticism (rather less for his cultural criticism), and it is true that his particular combination of critical acuity and moral intensity attracted a considerable number of followers in certain circles in England, and elsewhere, in the middle decades of the twentieth century. But in an essay that there is no particular reason for Mulhern to have cited, or even to have been aware of, I have tried to indicate why Leavis seems to me to be more of a warning than an inspiration where criticism of society is concerned, not least on account of the absence in his work of 'any adequately socio-political understanding of his own society, and a consequent inability to estimate social and political forces at their true strength'. As it also happens, I there offer further strictures on 'the tradition of literary critics as social critics that descended from Arnold' and itemize some of the 'common sins of cultural criticism carried out in this mode'.³⁸ It perhaps throws some light on differences of 'temper' between Mulhern and myself (if I may be allowed to take a favourite hobby-horse out for a short canter here) that he, despite fundamental reservations about the political logic of Leavis's work, emphasizes his regard for the reach of his cultural criticism on account of its 'theorized' and 'biting' character, whereas I, despite some regard for Leavis's work as a teacher and critic of literature, am more deterred by the superficiality and exaggeration characteristic of his cultural criticism.

More generally, Mulhern observes, quite justly, that one of my preferred forms is the intellectual portrait. However, he detects a sinister theoretical significance in this preference. For the 'unargued premise' of my work turns out to be 'one of the central commonplaces of literary-liberal culture in the twentieth century', namely, that 'literature . . . is to public discourse what the individual person is to the social order, the limit of classifying presumption'.³⁹ On another occasion one might pause to ask what authorizes this coarsely aggregative use of 'liberal'; similarly, 'commonplace' suggests that we are dealing with something that is taken to be mere common sense by members of that 'culture' but which can be seen for the peculiar or ideological belief it really is when viewed from

³⁸ 'The critic as anti-journalist. Leavis after *Scrutiny*', in Jeremy Treglown and Bridget Bennett, eds, *Grub Street and the Ivory Tower: Literary Journalism and Literary Scholarship from Fielding to the Internet*, Oxford 1998, pp. 151–76, at p. 172.

³⁹ 'What is Cultural Criticism?', p. 45.

the implicitly superior standpoint. But let us dwell for a moment longer on that neatly turned phrase, 'the limit of classifying presumption'. The implication, from the superior vantage-point outside this commonplace, is that prisoners of the commonplace regard *all* efforts at classification as potentially presumptuous (the 'liberal' culture has to be parodied as incurably nominalist and resistant to any activity of concept-formation). But, braving the sarcastic edge of the phrase, we might ask: does Mulhern himself really believe there could be *no* need for a 'limit to classifying presumption'? It seems clear that he does not, at least where others are doing the classifying. But in that case, 'the individual person' is *bound* to be one possible source of such limits in relation to 'the social order' simply because social classifications, in however 'realist' a vein we construe them, are classifications of groups of individuals.

Whether literature constitutes a particularly fruitful source of such 'limits' in relation to public discourse is, I would agree, open to discussion, but there is nothing inherently naïve or obstructively nominalist or reprehensibly conservative in thinking that it may do. As mnemonics for the larger argument involved, one may cite two distinguished, if contrasting, cultural critics on the question. First, there is the celebrated observation of Lionel Trilling: 'To the carrying out of the job [of cultural criticism] literature has a unique relevance . . . because literature is the human activity that takes the fullest and most precise account of variousness, possibility, complexity and difficulty'.⁴⁰ And secondly, there is the less familiar remark by Roland Barthes, not normally regarded as a sharer of the commonplaces of any putative 'literary-liberal culture': 'Knowledge is coarse, life is subtle, and literature matters to us because it corrects this distance'.⁴¹ Both these claims are, as I have already acknowledged, eminently contestable, but I recognize no standpoint from which

⁴⁰ Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society*, New York 1950, p. xv. Mulhern cites part of this passage in an earlier essay, finding Trilling's commitment to these qualities to be the essence of his 'feline liberalism' (*Present*, p. 90).

⁴¹ 'La science est grossière, la vie est subtile, et c'est pour corriger cette distance que la littérature nous importe': Roland Barthes, *Leçon* [Inaugural Lecture at the Collège de France], Paris 1978. The translation is taken from Michael Wood ('What Henry knew', *London Review of Books*, 18 December 2003), who reads 'science' as 'organized knowledge' and the idea of 'correction' as an optical one. In the *Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag, Richard Howard's translation is: 'Science is crude, life is subtle, and it is for the correction of this disparity that literature matters to us'.

they can be seen as *self-evidently* foolish or naïve, and nor, by the same token, do I see that one stands self-condemned as a result of being drawn to any such material that may indeed, in certain circumstances, help to 'set limits to classifying presumption'.

This point can also be addressed by reflecting on the import of what is merely a passing remark in 'Beyond Metaculture'. In the course of convicting Adorno of exhibiting a Marxist form of 'Kulturkritik', Mulhern points to the rather lofty tone of a sentence from *Prisms* in which Adorno was objecting to the ugliness and linguistically hybrid origins of the word 'Kulturkritik' in German, and he observes not just that the philology which Adorno implicitly appeals to is 'old school-room dogma', but also that 'the trope of discrimination is reminiscent of Henry James'.⁴² I would not want to defend Adorno's expression of literary or intellectual taste here nor any general appeal to old school-room philological dogma, but I could not help wondering whether being 'reminiscent of Henry James' would in this context be so self-evidently undesirable. I found myself thinking, by contrast, that discrimination is at the heart of any worthwhile cultural criticism, and that where discrimination is concerned James surely sets quite high standards. In making his own discriminations, he could certainly be precious and snobbish and much else besides, as, it seems, even Adorno could in his own way, but I would be sorry to think that, even when talking about cultural criticism in these rather unJamesian pages, he should only figure in this determinedly distanced way.

And that in turn led me to recall the exchange James had towards the end of his life with H. G. Wells, where Wells attacked the older novelist for a lack of social relevance (he memorably caricatured a James novel as 'a magnificent but painful hippopotamus resolved at any cost, even at the cost of its dignity, upon picking up a pea'). By contrast with this rarefied 'view of life and literature', Wells declared, 'I had rather be called a journalist than an artist'. It is, of course, the case that James did not tend to write much about the transformation of the social relations of capitalism, at least directly, and in those few novels that did take up some explicitly 'political' themes, such as *The Bostonians* and *The Princess Casamassima*, he hardly distinguished himself as an enthusiast for the 'progressive' causes of his day. But his magnificent response to

⁴² 'Beyond Metaculture', p. 96.

Wells may nonetheless not be entirely irrelevant to the would-be cultural critic, brooding on the comparative fruitfulness of different routes to insight and understanding.

But I *have* no view of life and literature, I maintain, other than that our form of the latter in especial [i.e. the novel] is admirable exactly by its range and variety, its plasticity and liberality, its fairly living on the sincere and shifting experience of the individual practitioner . . . For myself, I live, live intensely and am fed by life, and my value, whatever it be, is my own kind of expression of that . . . So far from [the art as opposed to the utility] of literature being irrelevant to the literary report upon life, and to its being made as interesting as possible, I regard it as relevant in a degree that leaves everything else behind. It is art that *makes* life, makes interest, makes importance, for our consideration and application of these things, and I know of no substitute whatever for the force and beauty of its process.⁴³

One does not have to subscribe to such aestheticism and subjectivism *au pied de la lettre* to feel that the ‘plasticity and liberality’ that James here invokes can indeed play a legitimate part in setting limits to classifying presumption.

3. ANOTHER WAVE OF THE WAND?

We have travelled a long way from my initial brief review-essay on Mulhern’s relatively short book. There I applauded the book’s perceptive discussion of cultural studies and its identification of the unobvious continuities with some earlier forms of cultural criticism. But as the exchange has gone on, the nature of the differences between us has become clearer to me. I have come to feel that Mulhern over-generalized and even, dare I say, over-theorized his case: certain historically variable characteristics were turned into logically necessary features; other configurations were ruled illegitimate or impossible. The effect of his argument was to *eliminate* the possibility of legitimate cultural criticism: all such criticism is branded as ‘*Kulturkritik*’, a variant of Metaculture; this is defined as an illegitimate attempt to take over the place rightfully occupied by politics. My role in this exchange has, therefore, principally been to lodge a protest: what we conventionally refer to as ‘culture’—a piece of shorthand whose limitations are familiar—still provides, I have

⁴³ Henry James to H. G. Wells, 10 July 1915, in Philip Horne, ed., *Henry James: a Life in Letters*, London 1999, pp. 554–5.

argued, a series of resources, idioms and perspectives that enable certain kinds of critical engagement with contemporary society. We do not have so many other resources of comparably enabling power, nor such imminent prospect of living in societies not in need of criticism, that we should hurry to rule this activity out of court just yet.

The primacy of politics

Mulhern, by contrast, constantly asserts and reasserts the primacy of politics. But what, exactly, does that entail in the present case? The prize that, according to his account, politics and culture are vying for is 'authority'. The term appears in every key formulation of his argument: metacultural discourse is trying 'to supplant the authority of politics'; culture asserts 'a claim to authority over the social whole'; culture attempts to displace politics 'in the disputed plane of social authority'; in 'Kulturkritik' culture is the 'valid—because truly general—social authority'; 'the defining aim of what was to become Cultural Studies proper was to demystify the presumptive *authority* of Kulturkritik' (italics in original); and so on. I find something curiously univocal about these formulations: culture is always cast as some kind of illegitimate claimant to a throne rightfully occupied by politics because 'authority' is singular and indivisible. It may be helpful, instead, to import a distinction from classical sociology at this point. Here, put schematically, 'social authority' is understood as 'the probability that people will obey a command recognized as legitimate according to the prevailing rules in their society', whereas 'cultural authority' is understood as 'the probability that particular definitions of reality and judgements of meaning and value will prevail as valid and true'.⁴⁴ Where social authority is concerned, the sense of there needing to be in any given space an ultimate or final authority is immediately intelligible; this is, from another angle, the Weberian understanding of the state as the institution possessing a legitimate monopoly of force in a given territory. But with cultural authority, this is presumably not so: there is no 'final authority', only competing claims to authority.

The implication of Mulhern's critique of cultural criticism appears to be to assign to *politics* a legitimate monopoly of which 'definitions of reality

⁴⁴ I take these particular formulations from Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*, New York 1982, p. 13; they may serve simply because Starr is here summarizing a body of classic sociological literature deriving from Weber and others.

and judgements of meaning and value will prevail as valid and true'. Thus, at one point in *Culture/Metaculture*, in again invoking a distinction between 'substance' and 'form', he refers to a particular position as 'one of moral substance' which he glosses as meaning 'having to do with specific social interests and purposes'.⁴⁵ This courts, it seems to me, a restrictive and theoretically specified sense of 'moral', perhaps a sociologically reductive one. But it illustrates from another angle what is at issue: for Mulhern, questions about values, including the very large questions about how we should live, are 'empty' unless resolved into questions about 'specific social interests'. The clash of specific social interests, in its explicit and injunctive form, is the dynamic of politics, and politics, thus understood, is ultimately the arbiter of 'definitions of reality and judgements of meaning and value'. Such an understanding is, needless to say, by no means peculiar to Mulhern, but perhaps he has, from his earliest work onwards, shown a special concern with the ways in which in twentieth-century Britain fundamental political issues have been sublimated into or disguised as issues of culture, especially culture as mediated by literary critics.

In his most recent work, Mulhern chooses to label his own approach as that of 'cultural politics'. Does this perhaps represent some kind of theoretical Third Way, assigning primacy neither to politics nor to culture? Clearly not, I would say. As a way of approaching this question, consider the passage in the Introduction to *The Present Lasts a Long Time* where Mulhern distinguished his sense of 'cultural politics' from two extremes or caricatures: on the one hand, 'culturalism', 'the generic tendency of the liberal critical tradition', which 'asserts the moral primacy of culture over politics'; and on the other 'instrumentalism', 'the error both fairly and falsely associated with socialist traditions, which elevates existing political priorities as the test of cultural legitimacy'.⁴⁶ But it should be noted that the terms in which this contrast is drawn silently introduce a triple asymmetry, so that a) 'the liberal tradition' is inescapably univocal, whereas 'socialist traditions' are allowed an appealing plurality; b) there is a part of these socialist traditions not 'fairly' open to this reproach, an extenuation not permitted to the liberal critical tradition; and c) the reproach in the case of the socialist traditions is narrowed to that of favouring 'existing political priorities', which then allows a true socialist politics to assert the moral primacy of

⁴⁵ *Culture/Metaculture*, p. 170.

⁴⁶ *Present*, p. 6.

some future form of social organization without incurring the charge of instrumentalism. Thus, a properly symmetrical version of the contrast would be: 'culturalism, the error both fairly and falsely associated with liberal traditions, which asserts the moral primacy of culture over politics', versus 'instrumentalism, the error both fairly and falsely associated with socialist traditions, which asserts the moral primacy of politics over culture'. Although these two positions are presented as the two extremes against which his own preferred 'cultural politics' is defined, the tilting of the contrast is only one indication of his actual leaning towards the latter member of the pair.

It is true that cultural politics, as he conceives it, may make use of the 'possibility' represented by the 'cultural excess', that is to say those aspects of meaning-bearing life which will always exceed or escape current political institutions and categories. But even so glossed, cultural politics is still politics, as his identifying it with 'the art of the possible' makes plain, as does his insistence that acknowledging the 'discrepancy', which is 'the space of cultural politics', is one of the marks of 'an emancipatory politics', here contrasted with 'any bourgeois political formula'.⁴⁷ So 'cultural politics' is not some third option which avoids giving priority to either politics or culture: it retains the primacy of politics, but seeks to exonerate itself, for the moment at least, from the charge of 'instrumentalism' by being open to the 'possibility' encoded in the cultural surplus. But always these possibilities are assessed by whether they point right or left; are you for us or against us; are you friend or enemy 'in final effect'? The evaluation is always 'in the first and last instance political'.⁴⁸

One of the most tiresome and coercive clichés in current speech (as I have no doubt Mulhern would agree) is the phrase 'at the end of the day'. Among the sources of its offensiveness is the way in which it is so often used to rule that there always comes a moment when all that has gone before is rendered irrelevant: from that rhetorical vantage-point, all that matters is the outcome or reigning state of affairs at a posited moment of judgement, as in the logic of a game or war or contest of

⁴⁷ *Culture/Metaculture*, pp. 174, 171, 162; *Present*, p. 7.

⁴⁸ *Present*, p. 2. In this last example, he apparently (but, I think, only apparently) modifies the claim by saying 'This evaluation of the historical probabilities is in the first and last instance political; but its underlying reasons find their premises in general theory, and are thus more than strictly political in their applications'.

some kind. Of course, the implication may be false even in the case of those activities: there may well be more significant things about a game than the result (I hope Mulhern will not regard this as merely a ‘con-vivial’ English view). But a more telling objection to the common use of the phrase is the way it dismisses a whole range of important considerations in favour of the overriding significance of one particular kind of balance-sheet. The metaphors are beginning to multiply, but one way to bring out the objectionableness of the cant phrase is to attend to the literal meaning lurking in the now more or less dead metaphor of ‘the end of the day’. For the fact is that twilight or nightfall are only very small parts of the day indeed. Most of life is lived during the rest of the day, and night, and no one moment provides a summative perspective on all the others. Something similar, it seems to me, might be said about assigning overriding status to some political ‘final analysis’ or ‘ultimate reckoning’, whether projected to an unspecified point in future historical time or presented as the terminal point reached by theoretical analysis. Of course, we all have ethical or other commitments, and some can rightly claim to be more fundamental than others. But perhaps we need to resist the temptation to let them exercise a prematurely clinching power on the grounds of their privileged status when, ultimately, ‘all is said and done’. ‘All’ never is said and done, and a political monism is no more appealing here than any other kind.

The work of criticism

Neither this essay nor any of my earlier contributions to this exchange are attempts to sketch a new theory of cultural criticism, not least because what I have to say is neither new nor a theory. What I have been offering is, in the first instance, a protest, a protest against the elimination or closing down of a range of possibilities. Our dispute can at one level be understood as being not just between two vocabularies or ways of talking, but also between two different expectations about the level of abstraction required of such vocabularies, and perhaps even about how closed or self-consistent such vocabularies will be. It is for that reason that my responses have mostly taken the form of small-scale, local disagreements, now with this way of stating a case, now with that piece of labelling or classificatory preference, and so on. I well realize that the price I pay for this tactic, if one is thinking purely in terms of some kind of competitive or two-sided ‘debate’, is an apparent lack of focus or of theoretical force. But the tactic is, I believe, the appropriate

expression of an underlying conviction about the value of persuasion and how persuasion takes place in these matters. That process seems to me more like contagion than like a mathematical demonstration; more like coming to enjoy someone's company than like losing at chess.

Mulhern's is undeniably a tidier intellectual world than mine, but the price of his impressively strenuous domestic regime may be that something valuable about cultural criticism has been tidied out of existence. Adapting Trilling's celebrated phrase, one may say that culture comprises the range of human activities that 'take the fullest and most precise account of variousness, possibility, complexity and difficulty', and for that reason cultural criticism is always likely to bring into play the kinds of consideration that are uncongenial to, or habitually neglected by, those more instrumental, pragmatic, aggregative processes which are nonetheless wholly necessary for running the world and getting its business done. Those general properties listed by Trilling may be encompassed in more than one way and alongside more than one set of political commitments. Equally, they are not constant or unambiguous goods in themselves, and not remotely the only goods. However, in that cluttered, medium-range, zone of engagement in which serious public debate takes place—well beyond the pragmatic hour-to-hour imperatives of action, but well short of the austere abstractions of systematic theory—any resources that help alert us to variousness, and thus help to prevent our conceptions from foreclosing the range of our perceptions, are worth having and worth nurturing.

So, what I take myself to have been doing as I have moved through what is by now a fairly extended series of these smaller, local disagreements, has been to engage in a practice, a practice which I believe I share with Mulhern though he may not be willing to accept this description of his part in the exchange. Criticism, the elaboration and justification of perceptions about a given object (which may, as in this case, include another writer's criticism), aims at persuasion. In any half-way interesting critical practice, the persuasion happens, as I have said, as much by example and attraction as by propositional enforcement. In the course of coming to be familiar with, perhaps eventually of coming to inhabit and take active possession of, a way of talking, a reader comes to share with the critic a number of discriminations, characterizations, enthusiasms, and aversions. Almost insensibly, certain other ways of talking start to appear, in the given context, as inexact, or exaggerated, or coarse-grained, or

coercive, and so on. It is always open to another voice in the conversation to challenge these perceptions, these judgements, these ways of talking, but the new voice is nonetheless necessarily involved in a version of the same practice. What we call ‘theories’ furnish powerful, provocative, and wholly legitimate contributions to such conversations, often setting the standards in respect of definition of terms and tightness of logical entailment. But such theories do not bring the conversation to an end. Criticism makes use of the resources at hand to call any such claims to finality into question, and when readers—who are, after all, simply potential interlocutors temporarily given over to silence—find themselves drawn to object, to agree, to admire, to doubt, to smile and to reflect, then the conversation has in practice already been moved on.

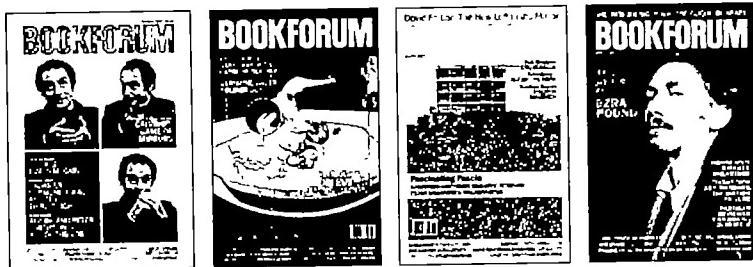
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BENEDICT ANDERSON

NITROGLYCERINE IN THE POMEGRANATE

José Rizal: Paris, Havana, Barcelona, Berlin—1

FOR A LONG TIME I had the vague feeling that José Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*, published in Berlin in 1887 (when he was twenty-six) and *El Filibusterismo*, out in Ghent in 1891 (he was then thirty), were almost too astonishing, not only in their technical narrative mastery, complex development of characters and linguistic richness, but because they were among the very first novels ever written by a Filipino. They offer a huge contrast with the sometimes charming amateurishness of the work of two generations of novelists in neighbouring Indonesia, before the 1950 arrival on the literary scene of Pramoedya Ananta Toer—more than half a century after Rizal's execution by the Spanish colonial government of the Philippines.¹

For all its satirical brilliance and the synoptic picture it gives of late nineteenth-century colonial society, *Noli Me Tangere* can be said—up to a certain point—to be realist in style. A wealthy young *mestizo*, Crisóstomo Ibarra, returns to the Philippines after years of study in Europe, with the intention of marrying his childhood sweetheart Maria Clara and starting a modern secular school in his home town. By the end of the novel all these dreams are in ruins, thanks to the machinations of reactionary, lustful members of the religious orders, and to the corruption and incompetence of the colonial administration. Maria Clara retires to the nameless horrors of a convent, and Ibarra himself seems to have perished, gunned down by the regime after being framed by the friars for a revolutionary conspiracy.²

The second novel is much stranger. The reader gradually discovers that Ibarra did not die—his noble alter ego, Elias, sacrificed his life to save him. After many years of wandering, principally in Cuba and Europe, and accumulating untold riches as a jewel-merchant, he returns to his homeland in the bizarre guise of Simoun, a gaunt figure with long white locks and deep blue spectacles which conceal the upper part of his face.³ His aim is to corrupt an already corrupt regime still further, to the point at which an armed uprising will be catalysed that will destroy the colonial order and liberate Maria Clara. The climax of the narrative is a conspiracy to detonate a huge nitroglycerine bomb at a wedding party attended by the entire colonial elite. The plot, however, comes unstuck. Maria Clara is discovered to be already dead and Simoun himself, gravely wounded, dies on a lonely shore before he can be arrested. Nothing in ‘real’ Philippine history corresponds to Simoun and his conspiracy. One could perhaps think of the novel as proleptic fiction, set in a time as yet to come—although no other Filipino would write ‘the future’ like this for more than a century. What possessed Rizal to write the sequel in such a peculiar way? From this point of view at least, *El Filibusterismo* was a much more enigmatic book than its predecessor.

The puzzlement remained, until two unrelated accidents occurred which sent me off on a chain of discoveries. One was a note from my brother, which arrived just as my book, *The Spectre of Comparisons*, was going to press. The other was a paper sent to me by a young Filipino scholar. What follows—a preliminary investigation of the intercalation of fiction and politics in the brief life of José Rizal, in the context of the Parisian avant-garde, nationalist insurrection in Cuba and the rise of anarchism

¹ Later canonized as the Founding Father of the Philippine nation, Rizal was born in the provincial town of Calamba in 1861 and shot down by a Spanish-officered, native firing squad in Manila in 1896. I would like to acknowledge the enormous amount of help I have received in preparing this text from: Ronald Baytan, Karina Bolasco, Jonathan Culler, Neil Garcia, Ellis Hanson, Carol Hau, Franco Moretti, Ambeth Ocampo and Joss Wibisono. All errors and follies are entirely my responsibility.

² See the two chapters devoted to Rizal and *Noli Me Tangere* in *The Spectre of Comparisons*, London 1998. The best English translations of the two works are probably those by Soledad Lacson-Locsin (Manila 1996 and 1997).

³ Simoun’s identity is the subject of much speculation by the characters in the novel. Some think that as a predatory capitalist speculator he must be Jewish; others deduce from the colour of his skin that he is a mulatto of *americano*, i. e. Latin American, probably Cuban, origin.

in Latin Europe during the 1880s and 1890s—are the first fruits of that quest. Part One is devoted to Rizal's fiction, particularly its connexions with Joris-Karl Huysmans's famously 'decadent' 1885 bombshell *À Rebours*. Part Two, to follow, considers how this fiction was shaped not only by the political activities of the Filipino student colony in Spain but by the experience of Cuba from the mid-nineteenth century; by the aftermath of the Commune; and by the rise in anarchist circles of terroristic 'Propaganda by the Deed'. Part Three will investigate the 'afterlife' of Rizal and his work, following his execution at the age of thirty five, on 30 December 1896, by a dying colonial regime.

Travelling imps

The title, *Spectre of Comparisons*, was adopted out of admiration for a brilliant phrase in *Noli Me Tangere*—'el demonio de las comparaciones'—evoking the young Ibarra's experience on seeing the seedy *Jardín Botánico* of Manila and perversely finding himself imagining in his mind's eye the grand botanical gardens he has visited in Europe.⁴ Or still better: Rizal writing, in Paris and Berlin, about a young man 'yonder' (*allá*) in Manila, who is thinking about . . . *allá*, Paris and Berlin.⁵ What I had not then noticed was the real peculiarity of this phrase in the context of the novel. *Noli Me Tangere* is full of witty expressions, but there is no other spooky and unsatirical phrase like this.

As the book was going to print, my brother wrote to me about a prose poem by Mallarmé, titled *Le Démon de l'analogie*, probably first composed in 1864, when Rizal was three years old. The work was published in *La Revue du monde nouveau* in 1874 as *La Pénultième*, and on March 28, 1885 in *Le Chat Noir*, once again as *Le Démon de l'analogie*.⁶ Perhaps, he suggested, Rizal might have been inspired by the poem, since he came

⁴ Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere*, Manila 1961, ch. 8, 'Recuerdos', p. 43.

⁵ See the exchange about this oscillation between Jonathan Culler and myself in Jonathan Culler and Pheng Cheah, eds, *Grounds of Comparison*, London 2003, at pp. 40–1, 45–6 and 228–30.

⁶ See Bradford Cook, trans., *Mallarmé: Selected Prose Poems, Essays and Letters*, Baltimore 1956, pp. 2–4, for a reasonable English version; the notes on the text, pp. 108–10, include a brief publication history. Cook points out its remarkable affinities with the monomaniacal story *Berenice* of Edgar Allan Poe (1809–49), which can be found in his *Tales*, Oneonta, NY 1930, pp. 219–38.

to live in Paris in the summer of 1885, just a few months after its most recent printed incarnation.⁷

My initial reaction was disbelief. Though Rizal started learning French from the age of twelve when he entered the Ateneo, the Jesuits' elite secondary school in Manila, surely he would not have been 'up to' so difficult and esoteric a text. But later the idea seemed worth looking into. It turned out that Mallarmé's title was a creative homage to *Le Démon de la perversité*, Baudelaire's translation of Edgar Allan Poe's story *The Imp of the Perverse*.⁸ The tale was first published in Poe's collected *Tales of the Grotesque and the Arabesque* in 1839, in barbarous Baltimore; and then by Baudelaire in 1857, in the second volume of his Poe translations.⁹ An eerie set of possibilities loomed up—from Poe's neurotic-psychological imp, through Baudelaire's quasi-theological demon and Mallarmé's uncanny source of poetic inspiration, to the political imaginings of a colonized Rizal-in-Europe. Perhaps Rizal had read, if not Mallarmé, then Baudelaire or Poe? In 1960 the Filipino bibliographer and bibliophile Esteban De Ocampo had published a list of the books in Rizal's personal library and of the books and authors he

⁷ In sorting through the tangled chronologies of 19th-century literary lives and letters, it may be useful to bear four broad generations in mind. Generation One would include Balzac, born 1799; Hugo, 1802; Dumas, 1803; Sue, 1804; Gogol and Poe 1809; Thackeray 1811; Goncharov and Dickens 1812. Generation Two: Turgenev and Emily Brontë, 1818; Melville and Eliot, 1819; Dekker, 1820; Flaubert, Baudelaire and Dostoevsky, 1821; Tolstoy, 1828. Generation Three: Machado de Assis, 1839; Zola, 1840; Mallarmé and Verlaine, 1842; Husmans, 1848 (perhaps the precocious Rimbaud, 1854, should be included here). The aftermath would be Conrad, 1857; Tagore, 1861; Rizal, 1862, and Nastume Soseki, 1867.

⁸ Mallarmé: *Selected Prose Poems*, Notes, pp. 455–61. It will be recalled that Poe's story, told in the first person, is that of a man who commits a perfect, untraceable murder, but is then so driven by the urge to proclaim his own brilliance that he ends up confessing to the crime. 'Imp' has nothing imposing or Christian about it, and is best translated into French as *lutin*. Baudelaire's decision to use *démon* instead gives the imp a grand and *ci-devant* Catholic aura.

⁹ *Nouvelles Histoires extraordinaires*, Paris 1857, of which *Le Démon de la perversité* was the opening tale. The first volume of the Poe translations, *Histoires extraordinaires*, had appeared in 1856. Both are reprinted, along with Baudelaire's introduction, in his *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris 1933, vol. 7. The genius of *Les Fleurs du mal* first encountered Poe's writing early in 1847, and was so exhilarated that he devoted much of the next sixteen years of his life to translating it. See Patrick Quinn, *The French Face of Edgar Poe*, Carbondale, 11 1957, pp. 9, 14, and 101.

referred to in his vast correspondence. Alas, this list included neither Poe, Baudelaire nor Mallarmé.¹⁰ A dead-end, it seemed.

The homeopath's apprentice

Then came the second accident: the arrival of a draft paper from the pioneering Gay Studies scholar Neil Garcia, of the University of the Philippines. Garcia had asked himself whether Rizal was gay, and answered the question negatively by saying, à la Foucault, that gayness did not yet exist in the 1880s. Garcia also seemed to feel that as a colonial *provinciano*, Rizal must have been sexually pretty innocent.¹¹ But the paper called serious attention to a short passage from the chapter of *El Filibusterismo* entitled 'Tipos Manileños' [Manila Types]. At the big opening night for a travelling French vaudeville troupe, the cynical student Tadeo regales his country-bumpkin cousin with scandalous gossip (mostly made up) about members of the Manila elite in the audience. 'That respectable gentleman, so elegantly dressed,' Tadeo comments at one point, 'is no doctor but a homeopathist of a unique type; he professes in everything the principle of *similia similibus*. The young cavalry captain arriving with him is his favourite disciple.'¹² The gossip is catty, but not shocked; moreover, its insinuation of homosexuality flies past the country boy who knows no Latin, and also does

¹⁰ Esteban A. De Ocampo, *Rizal as a Bibliophile*, Bibliographical Society of the Philippines, Occasional Papers, No. 2, Manila 1960. Thanks to the help of my connoisseur friend Ambeth Ocampo (no relation), I later discovered that De Ocampo's list was incomplete; a substantial number of library cards, in Rizal's own hand, existed in Manila's Lopez Museum. Still no Mallarmé, Baudelaire or Poe.

¹¹ Maybe so. But the presence in his personal library of Pierre Delcourt's *Le Vice à Paris* (4th edition, Paris 1888); Dr P. Garnier's *Onanisme* (6th edition, Paris 1888); Philippe Ricord's *Traité des maladies vénériennes* (Brussels 1836), and Vatsyayana's *Le Kama soutra* (Paris 1891) indicates that if indeed he was an innocent when he left the Philippines, his medical studies in Europe and other readings over the next decade left him quite a sophisticate.

¹² 'Ese respetable señor que va elegantemente vestido, no es médico pero es un homeópata sui generis. profesa en todo el *similia similibus* . . . El joven capitán de caballería que con él va, es su discípulo predilecto': José Rizal, *El Filibusterismo*, Manila 1990, p. 162 (my translation). This is a witty play on the famous motto, *similia similibus curantur*, of the founder of systematic homeopathy, the German physician Christian Friedrich Samuel Hahnemann. In his library Rizal had a copy of *Exposition de la doctrine médicale homéopathique*, a French translation (Paris 1856) of Hahnemann's standard work.

not understand the meaning of homeopathy. In other words, the figure 'Tadeo' appears to be addressing not a country boy but some fairly sophisticated readers.

Who were they? This question became still more pressing when I consulted the big facsimile edition of the original *El Filibusterismo* manuscript. For Rizal had first written, and then crossed out, the following phrase: *profesa en el amor el princ . . . similis similibus gaudet.*¹³ If we take *princ* to be *principio*, then we can translate the whole phrase as 'he professes in matters of love the principle that like rejoices in like', or 'like gains happiness from like'. *Gaudet* is a strong word in Latin, expressing gladness, happiness, even rapture. One can easily see why Rizal thought better of this formulation. Artistically speaking, it did not fit the cynicism of the character Tadeo, who never speaks of *amor*. But culturally and morally speaking, it would surely have been scandalous in the Philippines of the friars. Besides, were there prominent men in late-colonial Manila who showed up at big public events with their good-looking military boyfriends? It does not seem too likely.¹⁴ On the other hand, Garcia did not mention an equally striking passage in the following chapter about amorous affections between young girls, which is not in the facsimile—meaning that Rizal inserted it at the last minute.¹⁵ Neither passage is essential to the narrative, indeed both seem

¹³ José Rizal, *El Filibusterismo*, facsimile edition, Manila 1991, p. 157b (overleaf). '-bus' is a superscript, and the final 'a' seems to be a write-over of 's'. Probably then the true original was the grammatically correct *similis simili*.

¹⁴ Writing about the school-year 1877–78, when Rizal was 16 and still a student at the Jesuits' Ateneo, Felix Roxas recalled that the lads there, after studying Virgil and Fénelon (!) put on a play about the gods and goddesses of Olympus, with all the roles played by boys. Puberty being puberty, he wrote, passionate affairs developed, and finally one of the various love letters was intercepted by the prying, indignant fathers: see *The World of Felix Roxas*, trans. Angel Estrada and Vicente del Carmen, Manila 1970, p. 330. This book is an English translation of columns Roxas wrote in Spanish for *El Debate* between 1906 and 1936. There exists a not-widely-publicized contemporary photograph of the Father of the Philippine Nation looking pretty sultry in the role of Cleopatra.

¹⁵ The chapter, 'La Función' [The Show], describes the vaudeville performance and various characters' reactions to it. The French troupe puts on a scene set in servants' quarters, showing merry-making among *servantes*, *domestiques* and *cochers*. The first, clearly female, are probably kitchen staff; the second, of unclear gender, probably maids; the third group, unmistakably male, are coachmen. All three, however, are played by girls, the last in teasing drag. Towards the end of the chapter, the Narrator describes the jealousy of the beautiful opportunist *mestiza*, Paulita Gomez, watching her current beau, the student Isagani, in the audience: 'Paulita felt more

at first sight to be gratuitous. For whom were they inserted—for a primarily Philippine audience? Maybe, but a century would pass before any Filipino author again referred to male or female homosexuality in this casually sympathetic way.¹⁶

Parisian decadence

But Tadeo's mention of homeopathy struck a chord in my failing memory. I felt I had read a novel somewhere, long ago, in which homosexuality and homeopathy came together—the bizarre, scandalous *À Rebours* by the half-French, half-Dutch 'decadent' novelist Joris-Karl

and more depressed, thinking about how some of these girls, called *cochers*, might occupy the attention of Isagani. The word *cochers* reminded her of certain appellations which convent-school girls use among themselves to explain a species of affections.' ['Paulita se ponía más triste cada vez, pensando en como unas muchachas que se llaman *cochers* podían ocupar la atención de Isagani. *Cochers* le recordaba ciertas denominaciones que las colegialas usan entre sí para explicar una especie de afectos']. Rizal, *El Filibusterismo* [1990], p. 173; emphases in the text. The word *cochers* with its masculine gender, which takes her wandering thoughts back to her convent-school days, and the sexual implications of being a 'rider' or 'horseman', make the 'species of affections' referred to perfectly clear. A certain sociological reality seems intended, since the explanation of the French word as (nun-evading) teenage argot is the Narrator's gloss—notice the sudden switch to the generalizing present tense ('use among themselves') of *usan*.

¹⁶ No doubt part of the explanation for this long silence lies in the impact of American colonialism after 1898, and the educational apparatus it created. For the secular American schoolteachers, and for (later) Catholic clerics from places like Boston and Philadelphia, the literary culture of Antiquity was completely foreign—to say nothing of Fénelon. But the youngsters of Rizal's era, who were educated by Spanish Jesuits, were trained to be fluent in classical Latin. Ocampo's list (with the Lopez Museum additions) shows this very clearly. We find in Rizal's library Aesop, Caesar, Cicero, Horace, Livy, Lucretius, Ovid, Plautus, Tacitus and Thucydides. (In his correspondence, Rizal also speaks of Aeschylus, Plutarch, Sophocles and Xenophon, probably all in translation, though Rizal did study a bit of Greek at the Ateneo). Pagan classical Latin poetry in particular was suffused with descriptions of, or references to, amorous relations between males, both human and divine. Horace wrote humorously, and Virgil tenderly, about boys they had loved. Rizal does not mention Plato, but it is hard to think that he had never read the *Symposium*. Even if the friars censored, or tried to censor, what the young Filipinos read, there was no way to prevent them from seeing in their imaginations a highly civilized culture, from which Christianity, with its peculiar sexual obsessions, was entirely absent. The arrival of the Americans closed the gates to this magical ancient world. (No Filipino writer after Rizal would joke about the Diana of Ephesus with her 'numerous breasts'.) Here is one sadly unnoticed piece of cultural damage inflicted by the philistine North Americans on the generations that followed Rizal's.

Huysmans, which I had read, half-secretly, when I was about sixteen. It turned out that my remembrance was only 50 per cent correct. Homosexuality was there, and homeopathy too, but in quite unrelated contexts. Had Rizal ingeniously put them together? But Huysmans's name did not show up in Ocampo's little book. Besides, *À Rebours* was not translated into Spanish until around 1919 (with a foreword by Vicente Blasco Ibáñez), long after Rizal's death. The first English-language version came out at almost the same time. If Rizal had read *À Rebours*, he would have had to have done so in the original French edition, which had appeared only the year before his seven-month stay in Paris in 1885–86.⁷ Perhaps it was a sheer fluke that Huysmans and Rizal had put homeopathy and homosexuality together in novels written only seven years apart. But it seemed sensible to keep reading.

À Rebours has a single, aloof central character: a rich, elegant aristocrat named Des Esseintes, who is so appalled by the crass bourgeoisie of the French Third Republic, by the corruption of the Church, the shadiness of politicians, the poor quality of popular culture, etc., that he retreats into a private world of aesthetic fantasy and the cultivation of strange sexual experiences, avant-garde literature, rococo antiquarianism and 'mediaeval' Christian mysticism. Des Esseintes builds himself a weird, expensive home designed to expel Nature, which he regards as now passé. No real flowers, for example, but artificial ones made of rare and strange jewels; a pet tortoise slowly dying under a carapace entirely studed with gems. One cannot help but recall that Simoun, the central figure of *El Filibusterismo*, draws his singularity, his wealth and power, from trafficking in rare and antique precious stones. Another coincidence?

Maybe. But there were other, much stronger correspondences. In the long chapter where Des Esseintes's avant-garde literary preferences are laid out, special praise is given to the Huysmans's close friend Mallarmé; and in a list of the nobleman's favourite texts by the great poet, *Le Démon*

⁷ *À Rebours* (literally, 'on the reverse' or 'inside out') was first published in Paris by Charpentier in May 1884: see Robert Baldick's introduction to his translation of the work as *Against Nature*, London 1959, p. 10. The first English-language version came out as *Against the Grain*, New York 1922, bowdlerized of its erotic passages, and with a dishonest, oily introduction by the pseudo-radical sexologist Havelock Ellis, who got the original's date of publication wrong by five years. Subsequent editions restored the censored sections. The c. 1919 Spanish edition was published by Prometeo in Valencia, under the title *Al revés* (n.d.).

de l'analogie is expressly mentioned. Baudelaire's *Le Démon de la persévérance* and Poe too.¹⁸ If Rizal's French was as yet not up to managing the original prose-poem, could he not have got an interesting idea for his *Noli Me Tangere* simply from reading Mallarmé's eerie title listed in *À Rebours*? But the most striking coincidences between Huysmans's work and Rizal's turned out to be with *El Filibusterismo*, rather than with *Noli Me Tangere*. I will mention just three, all of which involve different kinds of sex.

Ventriloquists and murderers

First, the scene from *À Rebours* where a near-impotent Des Esseintes takes as a short-term mistress a young female ventriloquist. To get himself in the mood, he purchases two statuettes: one of polychrome terracotta, representing the classical Chimaera, a mythical female monster with a lion's head, goat's body and serpent's tail; the other—also female, also monstrous—a black marble Sphinx. These are placed at the far end of the bedroom, illuminated only by the dim glow of embers from the grate. The woman in bed with Des Esseintes, coached beforehand by her lover, then ventriloquizes the statuettes' sepulchral conversation, including the phrase from Flaubert's *Temptation of Saint Anthony*: 'I seek new perfumes, ampler blossoms, untried pleasures'.¹⁹ At this point, as hoped and planned, Des Esseintes's virility springs back to life.

In the extraordinary eighteenth chapter of *El Filibusterismo*—it is called 'Trickeries'—Simoun coaches Mr Leeds, a skilful North American (*un verdadero yankee*) prestidigitator and ventriloquist, in a scene reminiscent of Hamlet's use of the players to provoke his stepfather's guilty conscience.²⁰ Mr Leeds makes the mummified head of an ancient Egyptian speak of millennia-past horrors, endured at the hands of scheming priests—evils which exactly replicate those once inflicted on the young Ibarra and his doomed love Maria Clara by the lustful, conniving Father Salvi. This Dominican has been lured into

¹⁸ Joris-Karl Huysmans, *À Rebours* (Paris, n.d. but c. 1904), pp. 244, 235.

¹⁹ 'Je cherche des parfums nouveaux, des fleurs plus larges, des plaisirs inéprouvés'. Among the saint's final torments is a vision of the bank of the Nile, in which the two mythical beings, Sphinx and Chimaera, converse. See *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, Paris 1885, p. 254; the text appears in volume 5 of the author's *Oeuvres complètes*.

²⁰ Rizal attended a performance of Hamlet in Madrid on April 26, 1884. See entry for that date in *Diarios y Memorias. Escritos de José Rizal*, Tomo I, Manila 1961, p. 127.

attending the show, and now faints in guilty, superstitious terror. The curious thing is that Mr. Leeds summons the (clearly male) head to speak by using the single word: 'Sphinx!'.²¹ What is sexual-literary in Huysmans seems to have been transformed by Rizal, cross-gender, into the psychological-political.

Next, there is the curious scene in *À Rebours* where Des Esseintes picks up a teenager on the street and takes him to a very expensive brothel. There he pays for him to be initiated by 'Vanda', an experienced and seductive Jewish prostitute. While the boy is busy losing his putative virginity, Des Esseintes chats with the madam whom he knows very well. 'So it's not on your own account that you've come tonight', says Madame Laure. 'But where the devil did you pick up that baby?'

'On the street, my dear.' 'Yet you're not drunk', murmured the old woman. Then, after a moment's reflection, she added, with a maternal smile: 'Ah! I understand; come on, you rascal, tell me, you need them young.' Des Esseintes shrugged his shoulders. 'You're off the mark. It's nothing like that', he went on. 'The truth is that I am simply preparing an assassin.'²²

Having denied any sexual interest in the lad, he then explains his scheme. He will pay for the boy's sessions with 'Vanda' for about six weeks, and at that point will cut him off. By then, the youngster will be sexually addicted, and to pay for further sessions, will turn to burglary and thus eventually to murder. Des Esseintes's ultimate purpose is to create 'one enemy more for this hideous society which holds us to ransom'.²³ This is, however, merely a moral/immoral and aesthetic gesture. One more corrupted teenager will not in himself change much in France.

But in *El Filibusterismo*, Simoun's basic project is intended to change everything. As he tells Basilio, the young medical student who has felt

²¹ 'Esfingel!' *El Filibusterismo* [1990], p. 135. Or was Mr Leeds an admirer of Flaubert?

²² 'Alors ce n'est pas pour ton compte que tu viens, ce soir . . . Mais où diable as-tu levé ce bambin?' 'Dans la rue, ma chère.' 'Tu n'es pourtant pas gris', murmura la vieille dame. Puis, après réflexion, elle ajouta, avec un sourire maternel: 'Je comprends, mâtin, dis donc, il te les faut jeunes, à toi.' Des Esseintes haussa les épaules, 'Tu n'y es pas; oh! mais pas du tout,' fit-il; 'la vérité c'est que je tâche simplement de préparer un assassin'. *À Rebours*, pp. 103–6, part of chapter 6, which was wholly censored in the Havelock Ellis-prefaced New York translation of 1922. My translations.

²³ In the original: 'un ennemi de plus pour cette hideuse société qui nous rançonne'.

powerless before the clerical murderer of his little brother, whose death had driven their mother insane:

Victim of a vicious system, I have wandered throughout the world, labouring night and day to amass a fortune and bring my plan to fruition. Now I have returned to destroy this system, precipitate its corruption, and push it to the abyss towards which it insensately hurtles—even if I have to make use of torrents of tears and blood. There it stands, self-condemned, and I do not wish to die before seeing it shattered to pieces at the bottom of the precipice.²⁴

Meanwhile Simoun will use his vast wealth to further corrupt the whole ‘ransom-holding’ colonial order—inciting it to greater greed, vaster embezzlements, worse cruelties and deeper exploitation, to bring on the cataclysm. As noted, his final scheme is to place a huge nitroglycerine bomb, hidden inside a fantastic Huysmans-esque jewelled lamp in the shape of a pomegranate, in the midst of a wedding party attended by all Manila’s top colonial officials. Meantime, Julí, Basilio’s beloved fiancée, has committed suicide to avoid succumbing to the goatish friar Padre Camarro, and the boy is now psychologically ready to become ‘one more enemy for this hideous colonial society’. He is quickly convinced by Simoun to get his personal revenge by helping organize a pitiless massacre of any adult male not supporting the ‘revolution’. This is a political project, not an aesthetic gesture, and reminds us that the 1880s and 1890s were the heyday of spectacular assassinations and other ‘outrages’ in Europe and the US, committed by despairing and hopeful anarchists.

Untried pleasures

Finally, there is the episode in *À Rebours* where Des Esseintes picks up an attractive teenage boy and has a sexual relationship with him for several months, which he describes summarily as follows: ‘Des Esseintes could never think of it again without shuddering; never had

²⁴ ‘Víctima de un sistema viciado he vagado por el mundo, trabajando noche y día para amasar una fortuna y llevar a cabo mi plan. Ahora he vuelto para destruir ese sistema, precipitar su corrupción, empujarle al abismo a que corre insensato, aun cuando tuviese que emplear oleadas de lágrimas y sangre . . . Se ha condenado, lo está y no quiero morir sin verle antes hecho trizas en el fondo del precipicio’: *El Filibusterismo* [1990], p. 46. My translation.

he endured a more alluring, and a more imperious captivity; never had he experienced such perils, never too had he been more painfully satisfied.²⁵ One should not take these sentences out of context. Des Esseintes, like Huysmans himself, is heterosexual, with a long string of mistresses. The affair with the boy appears to be part of a Flaubertian search for *plaisirs inéprouvés*.

There is no equivalent to this episode in *El Filibusterismo*, and Simoun appears to be completely asexual. Yet it may suggest a context for the half-bowdlerized description of the elegant 'homeopathist' and his favourite disciple. The account of Des Esseintes's avant-garde tastes in poetry in *À Rebours* praises not only Mallarmé in the highest terms, but also Verlaine; and in a preface for a re-issue of the novel in 1903, Huysmans declared that he would have awarded Rimbaud the same accolade had he published a full collection of his poems by the year *À Rebours* originally came out. But the epoch-making *Les Illuminations* only appeared two years later, in 1886, just before *Noli Me Tangere*, and well after Rimbaud had abandoned poetry and Europe.²⁶

²⁵ 'Des Esseintes n'y pensait plus sans frémir; jamais il n'avait supporté un plus attrant, et un plus impérieux fermage; jamais il n'avait connu des périls pareils, jamais aussi il ne s'était plus douloureusement satisfait.' *À Rebours*, pp. 146–8, at p. 147.

²⁶ Rimbaud's flight from Europe is usually associated with the ten years he spent mainly as a business-agent in Aden, and later a gun-runner for Menelik in Harar. But his first real journey out of Europe took place in 1876, when he went to the Netherlands Indies as a mercenary recruit to the Dutch colonial military. He was certainly aware that three years earlier the colonial regime had begun what would eventually be a brutal 30-year campaign to subdue the people of Aceh. Arriving in Batavia on July 20 via Aden, he had two weeks of boot-camp before being sent to Central Java. A fortnight later he deserted, and managed to elude the authorities for long enough to strike some kind of bargain with the Scottish captain of an undermanned vessel shipping sugar back to Europe. Disguised as the sailor 'Mr Holmes' he endured a gruelling 90-day voyage to Cork, via the Cape, before reappearing in France in early December. The barracks in Tuntang where he served for a fortnight—in the cool hills behind the great Javanese port of Semarang—still placidly exist. He was back in Aden by June 1879. (My thanks to Joss Wibisono for this information and the references below.) It is nice to imagine the 21-year-old Rizal waving to him from the deck of the *Djemnah* in the summer of 1882, as the ship moored off Aden before heading up the Red Sea towards Europe. See Graham Robb, *Rimbaud*, London 2000, ch. 25; Wallace Fowlie, *Rimbaud: A Critical Study*, Chicago 1965, pp. 51ff.

Verlaine and Rimbaud were of course ‘notoriously’ tempestuous lovers, and some of their poems made clear references to their sexual relationship. Verlaine was a life-long friend of Huysmans; besides, in avant-garde literary circles, it was a point of honour to disdain bourgeois, official and good-Catholic conceptions of morality.²⁷ Given Rizal’s sojourn in Paris in the second half of 1885, mid-point between the equally sensational *À Rebours* and *Les Illuminations*, and his later frequent visits, his allusions to male and female homosexuality in *El Filibusterismo* may have been stimulated in part by his perusal of Parisian publications. Lesbian affections, furthermore, were very chic in nineteenth-century French literature at least from the time of Balzac. Conceivably, then, these passages represent a certain claim to Philippine modernity *à la parisienne*.

Lastly, it is perhaps worth noting that prior to *À Rebours*, Huysmans had published sketches of Parisian society—in the sober vein of his early literary mentor Zola—under the title *Types parisiens*; corresponding in title, if not in tone, with *El Filibusterismo*’s satirical ‘Manila types’.

The luxury of French

So much for Huysmans, except to observe that *À Rebours*, coming out in May 1884, was a huge *succès de scandale*, enraging especially the Catholic clergy and *bien-pensant* bourgeois society.²⁸ The 24-year-old Rizal arrived in Paris fourteen months later, in July 1885, and stayed till January 1886, when he left for Germany. *À Rebours* was still the literary talk of the town. We know little of what Rizal did in Paris, except to take classes with a then famous ophthalmic surgeon. But he stayed with close Filipino friends, the philologist Trinidad Pardo de Tavera and the painter

²⁷ In those days Paris—like London, Berlin, Barcelona—already had its organized underground world of male and female homosexual bars and cruising areas, which a touristy Huysmans visited on several occasions with his homosexual friend, the writer Jean Lorrain. See Ellis Hanson, *Decadence and Catholicism*, Cambridge, MA 1997, ch. 2, ‘Huysmans Hystérique’, esp. p. 149.

²⁸ Huysmans himself recalled in his 1903 preface to *À Rebours* that the book ‘fell like a meteorite into the fairground of literature; there was both stupefaction and fury’ [*tombait ainsi qu’un aérolite dans le champ de foire littéraire et ce fut et une stupeur et une colère*]. His amusing description of all the different, contradictory hostilities he had aroused can be found on pp. 25–6.

Juan Luna, who had lived in the magical city longer, and were more fluent in French.²⁹

Rizal once said that he had written a quarter of *Noli Me Tangere* while in Paris.³⁰ He later seriously considered writing his second novel in French, in order to reach a world audience. In a memoir of his time with Rizal in Paris, Máximo Viola recalled: 'when I asked him the reason for this needless luxury of French, he explained to me that his purpose was to write from then on in French in the event that his *Noli Me Tangere* proved to be a failure, and his countrymen did not respond to the objectives of the work'.³¹ In a letter of 2 July 1890, Rizal's close friend Ferdinand Blumentritt wrote to him: 'I eagerly await the book that you are to write in French; I foresee that it will provoke a colossal sensation'.³² In the end, of course, *El Filibusterismo* was written in Spanish, not French. It was printed in 1891 in Ghent. Three years earlier, in 1888, and only forty miles away in Ostend, James Ensor finished his extraordinary proleptic anarchist-revolutionary painting *Christ's Entry into Brussels, 1889*, which has a very Rizalean mixture of

²⁹ Rizal's competence in French is something worth further study. In his *Diario de Viaje. De Calamba a Barcelona* [1882], entry for May 12, he noted shipboard that he was reading Walter Scott's 'Carlos el Temerario' [*Quentin Durward?*] in a French translation. Scott's vocabulary is rich and complex, so that to enjoy him in French would have required some real competence at reading, even if not speaking or writing, that language. See *Diarios y Memorias*, in *Escritos de José Rizal*, Tomo I, p. 47. But eight years later, in a letter to his bosom friend, the Austrian ethnologist Ferdinand Blumentritt, from Brussels, dated 28 June 1890, he wrote that he was studying French hard under the best teacher around. See 'Cartas entre Rizal y el Profesor Fernando Blumentritt, 1890–1896', part 3 of Book 2 of Tomo II of the *Correspondencia Epistolar*, Manila 1961, pp. 668–71. Was he studying literary writing only?

³⁰ Léon Ma. Guerrero, *The First Filipino, a Biography of José Rizal*, Manila 1987, p. 121. The book spends only two pages on Rizal's months in Paris. One reason for this may be the remarkable paucity of letters from Rizal to anyone, including his family in Calamba, over those seven months.

³¹ 'Y cuando quise saber la razón de ser de aquel lujo innecesario del francés, me explicó diciendo de que su objeto era escribir en adelante en francés, caso de que su *Noli Me Tangere* fracasara, y sus paisanos no respondieran a los propósitos de dicha obra'. See Viola's 'Mis Viajes con el Dr Rizal' in *Diarios y Memorias*, p. 316

³² 'Ich sehe mit Sehnsuche dem Buche entgegen, dass Du auf franzosich schreiben wirst, ich sehe voraus, dass es ein ungeheures Aufsehen erregen wird'. 'Cartas entre Rizal y el Profesor Fernando Blumentritt, 1890–1896', *Correspondencia Epistolar*, Tomo II, Book 2, Part 3, p. 677.

biting social satire, caricature, romanticism, and rebellion. Definitely a coincidence, but a nice one.

Writing revenge

A quite different insight came to me in the course of research for an essay on the great Dutch writer, Eduard Douwes Dekker—pen name, Multatuli—and his bombshell ‘anticolonial’ novel *Max Havelaar*, which was first published in 1860, and translated into German, French and English in the 1860s and 1870s. It is one of the first anticolonial novels to be based on concrete experience in a colony. *Max Havelaar* is also, among other things, about a young, idealistic hero (like Ibarra in *Noli Me Tangere*), who tries to defend the oppressed natives, and who is politically and financially destroyed by an alliance between corrupt colonial bureaucrats and sinister native chiefs. The novel can be understood as Dekker’s returning fire on the powerful enemies who had not only forced him out of the colonial civil service to return home in penury, but were continuing a brutal exploitation of the Javanese peasantry.

Rizal ran across *Max Havelaar* in late 1888 while in London, probably in the quite good English translation. He was reading it shortly after *Noli Me Tangere* had come out; Dekker himself had died the year before. In a December 6th letter to Blumentritt (who, of course, had never heard of the book), Rizal wrote:

Multatuli’s book, which I will send you as soon as I can obtain a copy [in Dutch; Blumentritt’s English was probably vestigial], is extraordinarily exciting. Without a doubt, it is far superior to my own. Still, because the author is himself a Dutchman, his attacks are not as powerful as mine. Yet the book is much more artistic, far more elegant than my own, although it only exposes one aspect of Dutch life on Java.³³

Rizal thus recognized the affinities between his own novel and Dekker’s, though they had been written a quarter of a century apart. What is worth

³³ ‘Das Buch Multatuli’s, welches ich dir senden werde, als bald wie ich es bekommen, ist ausserordentlich reizend. Kein Schweifel [Zweifel], ist es meinem weit überlegen. Nur, da der Verfasser selbst ein Niederländer ist, so sind die Angriffe nicht so heftig wie meine; aber es ist viel künstlicher, viel feiner, obgleich nur eine Seite von dem Niederländischen Leben auf Java entblösst.’ Letter in ‘Cartas entre Rizal y el Profesor Fernando Blumentritt, 1888–1890’, *Correspondencia Epistolar*, Tomo II, Book 2, Part 2, p. 409.

thinking about is the possibility opened up for Rizal by Dekker's using a novel to take anticolonial political, and personal, revenge—a prospect that will be explored in the sequel to this essay.³⁴

Rodolphe's children

A fine article by Paul Vincent about Dekker not only makes explicit comparisons between *Max Havelaar*, *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, but points out that Dekker, contemptuous of the Dutch literary world in that period, revered *Don Quixote* and *Tristram Shandy*, and was inspired mainly by Walter Scott in English and Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas (*père*) and Eugène Sue in French. Vincent also comments that the 'heroes' Max Havelaar and Crisóstomo Ibarra clearly descend, by separate lines, from the socialist aristocrat Rodolphe, whom Sue made the hero of his 1844–45 blockbuster *Les Mystères de Paris*.³⁵ Like Rizal, Sue started out as a dandy, but underwent a political conversion around 1843, in his late thirties, which made him an ardent (Proudhonian) socialist and an energetic enemy of Louis Napoleon, the biggest French imperialist of them all, who drove him to exile, penury and death three years before Rizal was born.³⁶

Sue benefited from, and exploited, the innovation of the *roman-feuilleton*, novels serialized in competitive daily newspapers, which created huge new markets for novelists. (His works were rapidly translated into all the major European languages.) Publishers encouraged gifted writers to keep readers hooked from issue to issue by artful suspense, intrigue, exotic settings, undying tragic loves, revenge, and panoramic views of all levels of society. Composing this kind of serialized novel meant holding multiple plots together, usually by means of an unnamed, omniscient narrator; abrupt shifts from milieu to milieu and time to time; and a

³⁴ As we shall see, between 1889 and 1891 Rizal's family was financially ruined by an alliance between the colonial regime and the Dominicans. His father, his elder brother Paciano, two sisters, and two brothers-in-law were exiled to remote parts of the archipelago.

³⁵ Paul Vincent, 'Multatuli en Rizal Nader Bekijken [Further Reflections on Multatuli and José Rizal]', *Over Multatuli*, 5 (1980), pp. 58–67.

³⁶ A witty, intelligent and sympathetic biography of Sue (1804–59) is Jean-Louis Bory, *Eugène Sue, Le roi du roman populaire*, Paris 1962. A good recent edition of the 1,300-odd page novel was published in 1989 by Robert Laffont in Paris.

moralizing, populist politics.³⁷ (Needless to say these *romans-feuilleton* were mostly suppressed under Louis Napoleon). Sue's second great hit *Le Juif errant*, which appeared over 1845–46, especially interested me because its structure is held together by a conspiracy of evil Jesuits, whose tentacles stretch as far as Dutch colonial Java.³⁸ Rizal's two novels contain nearly all these structural and thematic elements (especially murderous clerical conspiracy). It is not at all difficult to imagine them being successfully serialized in a popular newspaper (but where?).

Dumas père (1803–70) was another master of the *roman-feuilleton* genre, and his *Comte de Monte Cristo*—the story of Edmond Dantès, ruined and imprisoned for many years by a conspiracy of his enemies, who reappears, disguised as the Count of Monte Cristo, to take vengeance on them—is, as it were, Ibarra and Simoun rolled into one. Coincidence? Again, unlikely. In his 'Memorias de un estudiante de Manila', written

³⁷ See Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France*, Cambridge, MA 1989, p. 47; and Paolo Tortonese, 'La Morale e la favola' Lettura dei *Misteri di Parigi* como prototipo del *roman-feuilleton*, mimeo, n.d. (My thanks to Franco Moretti for giving me a copy of this text.) The pioneer editor was Émile de Girardin who in 1836 started serializing Balzac's *La vieille fille* in his new newspaper *La Presse*.

³⁸ The text available to me is an 1889 English translation, running to over 1,500 pages, published in three volumes and with some terrific illustrations. The Jesuits' agents include both a shady Dutch colonial businessman and a skilfully murderous Thug, on the lam from the (English) East India Company. (Governor-General William Bentinck had launched an extermination campaign against the Thugs in 1831, a little more than a decade before *Le Juif errant* began to be serialized.) But the Proudhonian socialist took Dutch rule in the Indies completely for granted. Rizal tells us that he bought a Spanish translation of this immense work for 10 pesetas, while paying another 2.50 for works by Dumas père and Horace (see entry for January 6, 1884, in his *Diario de Madrid*, in *Diarios y Memorias*, p. 114). On January 25, he recorded that he had just finished the book, and offered this pithy comment: 'This novel is one of those which have struck me as the most consciously contrived, unique children of talent and premeditation. It does not speak to the heart like the sweet language of LAMARTINE. It imposes itself, dominates, confounds, and subjugates, but does not make [me] weep. I don't know if the reason for this is that I have become hardened.' ['Esta novela es una de las que me han parecido mejor urdidas, hijas únicas del talento y de la meditación. No habla al corazón como el dulce lenguaje de LAMARTINE. Se impone, domina, confunde, subyuga, pero no hace llorar. Yo no sé si es porque estoy endurecido.'] *Diario de Madrid*, p. 118. The lines are especially important in that Rizal very rarely commented analytically on the fiction that he read. Why he was so reticent is an interesting question to think about.

under the pen name P. Jacinto in 1878, Rizal said that he had read *El Conde de Montecristo* at the age of twelve, 'relishing its sustained dialogues, delighting in its charms, and following step by step the hero and his revenges'.³⁹ But none of these writers were much interested in the colonies or imperialism, and their characters' revenges are basically personal and metropolitan. Here cross-pollination with Dekker's novel may have been productive.

At this juncture, we can turn back to reflect on the overall content of Ocampo's little treatise on the books Rizal had in his library in Calamba, and those he mentioned in his correspondence and other papers. Combined with the library cards in the Lopez Museum, it shows that as far as 'modern' prose fiction was concerned Rizal's overwhelming preference was for French authors; and the author with the most titles in his personal library was Eugène Sue.⁴⁰

³⁹ 'saboreando los sostenidos diálogos y deleitándose en sus bellezas, y siguiendo paso a paso a su héroe en sus venganzas': *Diario de Madrid*, p. 13.

⁴⁰ We find (* indicates authors in Rizal's library in the Philippines) Balzac, *Chateaubriand, *Daudet, *Dumas (5 texts), *Hugo, La Bruyère, *Lesage, *Sue (10 texts), Verne, *Voltaire, and *Zola (4 texts). Aside from these writers, there are Andersen, *Cervantes, *Defoe, *Dekker, *Dickens, *Goethe, Gogol, Hebel, *Hoffmann, *Bulwer Lytton, *Manzoni, Swift, *Thackeray and Turgenev. French 11, English 4, German 3, Russian 2, Danish 1, Irish 1, Italian 1, Dutch 1 and Spanish 1. This maybe the appropriate moment to bring up something Rizal wrote (again, in German) in a letter to Blumentritt from London on November 8, 1888. He told his friend that the problem in the Philippines was not really a lack of books. Booksellers actually did good business. In Calamba itself, a small town with between five and six thousand people, there were six small libraries, and in his own family's collection there were more than a thousand volumes. 'Yet most of the books they sell are religious and narcotic [opiate!]. Many people have small libraries, not large, since books are very expensive. People read Cantú [a then-famous Italian writer on world history], Laurent [perhaps the great French chemist Auguste Laurent], Dumas, Sue, Victor Hugo, Escriche [a well-known legal scholar], Schiller, and many others.' See *The Rizal–Blumentritt Correspondence, I. 1886–1889*, Manila 1992, second unnumbered page after p. 208. There is another 'international' point here. The thousand-book family library was obviously largely built by Rizal's parents. We can get an idea of their broad culture from four letters sent home by Rizal between June 21 and August 2, 1883 during his first trip to Paris (he was then 22). He describes going to Notre Dame, and being reminded of Victor Hugo's novel of the same name. He loves the Titians, Raphaels and Vincis in the Palais du Luxembourg. He makes a pilgrimage to the tombs of Rousseau and Voltaire at what would soon become the Panthéon. He wanders round the Louvre, casually noting that

This pattern is not too surprising. For much of the nineteenth century Paris was indeed the capital of the 'World Republic of Letters', as Pascale Casanova has shown; with London eager to supplant it.⁴ Hence it drew to itself—physically and intellectually—writers from all over Europe and beyond. We have seen this as the main reason why Rizal seriously considered writing *El Filibusterismo* in French, and why Blumentritt was enthusiastic about the idea. But Poe's first murder mystery, written in Baltimore two decades before Rizal's birth, was already set in the Rue Morgue, and his pioneering intellectual detective, the Parisian Auguste Dupin, would in due time become the grandfather of London's Sherlock Holmes and many others. North and South Americans were visiting Paris, or staying there self-exiled. Ivan Turgenev lived there off and on during Rizal's early youth and brought with him the works of the other Russian giants.

By mid-century, however, the world-literary peripheries were on the move—the USA of Herman Melville (b. 1819, *Moby Dick*, 1851); the Russia of Ivan Goncharov (b. 1812, *Oblomov*, 1859), Ivan Turgenev (b. 1818, *Fathers and Sons*, 1862), Fyodor Dostoevsky (b. 1821, *Crime and Punishment*, 1866) and Leo Tolstoy (b. 1828, *War and Peace*, 1866); the Holland of Douwes Dekker (b. 1820, *Max Havelaar*, 1860); the Brazil of Machado de Assis (b. 1839, *Memorias póstumas de Bras Cubas*, 1882); the Bengal of Rabindranath Tagore (b. 1861, *Gora*, 1908); and the Japan of Natsume Soseki (b. 1867, *I am a cat*, 1905)—to mention only a few. In this perspective Rizal (1861–96) seems personally precocious but not in the least an isolated figure. He learned much from, and in, literary Paris, but he transformed a great deal of what he absorbed, almost always in a political direction. If I am right, Mallarmé's aesthetic demon became the *demonio de las comparaciones* haunting the colonized

part of it was burned by the Commune in 1871, and admiring the Titians, Correggios, Ruisdaels, Rubenses, Murillos, Velasquezes, Riveras, Van Dykes, Raphaels and Vincis, as well as the Venus de Milo. He even goes to the Musée Grévin to see the waxworks of Hugo, 'Alphonso' Daudet, 'Emilio' Zola, Arabi (Pasha), Bismarck, Garibaldi, and Czars 'Alejandro' II and III. The striking thing is that he explains none of these names, and obviously feels no need to do so. His parents are already perfectly familiar with them. See *Cartas a sus Padres y Hermanos*, in Tomo I of the *Escritos de José Rizal*, pp. 90–106.

⁴ Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres*, Paris 1999; *The World Republic of Letters*, Cambridge, MA forthcoming.

intellectual, Dumas's 'sustained dialogues' became urgent debates about the paths to freedom, Sue's panorama of the social structure of Paris was changed into a synoptic diagnosis of colonial society, and so on. But nothing shows his creativity better than the manner in which the avant-garde aesthetic of Huysmans was borrowed from, and radically transformed, to stimulate the imaginations of young Filipino anti-colonial nationalists to come.

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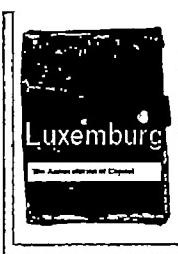
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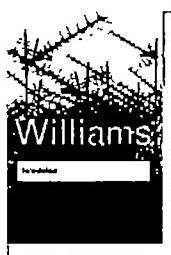
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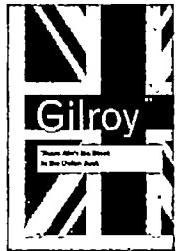
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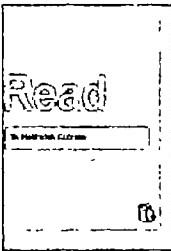
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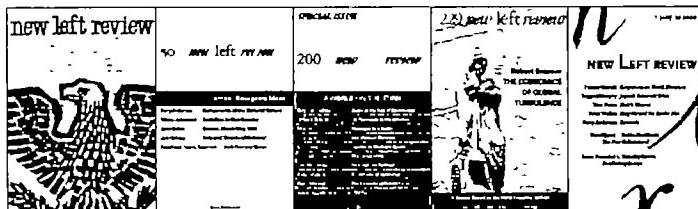
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TOKYO'S HIGH-ART EMPORIA

IN THE WEST, people seem to prefer to keep the business of buying and selling separate from their aesthetic pleasures. In Japanese consumer culture, by contrast, it has for decades been established practice for shopping to go hand in hand with art. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, department stores in Japan have set up exhibition spaces within their premises as an extra attraction to entice customers to cross their thresholds. The development was part of the evolution that they underwent from their distant origins as kimono shops—the stores, as elsewhere, gradually transcending their original commercial function, and assuming a new and wider role as monuments to urban modernity. Like Bon Marché in Paris, the Tokyo stores would become ‘a permanent fair, an institution, a fantasy world, a spectacle of extraordinary proportions, so that going to the store became an event and an adventure’.¹ Not only were they sites—that is, *loci*—of consumption, but sights—spectacles—of consumption, too.² Here the Meiji period’s preoccupation with Westernization was given concrete form—in the ornate Renaissance-style buildings constructed to house the stores, as well as in the large variety of foreign goods on display for sale.

Being sites of a spectacle of Westernization—an imagined West, of course, infused and conflated with Japanese values, rather than a real one—Tokyo stores could, from the beginning, encourage consumption by associating it with images of quality and prestige. The status accorded to foreign goods was such that they immediately took precedence, in terms of visibility and glamour, over domestic products. Theatricality and appearance, the marketing of an image, were to become an integral part of selling practices. The package on offer included not only displays of merchandise designed to dazzle the eye, but also music, drama and other cultural events, art exhibitions, mini-zoos, roof gardens

with panoramic views of Tokyo, hot houses, Shinto shrines, bandstands, huts for tea ceremonies and pergolas, not to mention in-house magazines, advertising campaigns and a whole range of other innovations. With the cultivation of the new consumerism went the promotion of a whole lifestyle.³

More specific to Japan was the birth of the *terminal depato*. In 1929 the Hankyu Railway Company founded the prototype in its Osaka Umeda Station, heralding not only a new form of shopping, but a wholesale reorganization of contemporary urban life in Japan. While earlier department stores had still catered primarily to the more affluent, upper-middle-class clientele that had patronized the kimono shops, the *terminal depato* was targeted at an emergent middle- or lower-middle class who used the railway terminus as part of their everyday routine. The mass-transit companies who set up these *terminal depatos* at the end of their lines imitated the promotional styles of the established department stores by providing, for example, hairdressing salons and marriage bureaux, as well as restaurants selling delicacies such as swiss rolls and choux-cream éclairs (which immediately launched a popular new culinary fashion).⁴ They also built amusement parks to cater for family weekend trips. Housing estates were constructed on land immediately adjacent to the railway lines, with the aim of increasing the number of commuters on their trains.

The ultimate goal of these exercises in social engineering was to facilitate and encourage consumerism—and to attract the passengers into the department stores, strategically situated within the urban rail termini. In this chain of endless consumption, created and sustained by different groups of railway conglomerates, the *terminal depato* can be seen as a sort of consumerist nirvana, to which every aspect of the daily lives

¹ Michael Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869–1920*, Princeton 1981, p. 167.

² As Stuart Ewen and Elizabeth Ewen punningly put it. See *Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness*, Minneapolis 1994, p. 45.

³ For a historical analysis of the Japanese department store, see Tohru Hatsuda, *The Birth of Department Stores*, Tokyo 1999; Yuki Jinno, *The Birth of Taste*, Tokyo 1994; Tomoko Tamari, 'On the Social Functions of Japanese Department Stores', *Cultural Economics*, vol. 1, no. 4, September 1999, pp. 53–63. All the above texts are in Japanese.

⁴ Brian Moeran, 'The Birth of the Japanese Department Store', in Kerrie MacPherson, ed., *Asian Department Stores*, Honolulu 1998, p. 164.

of Tokyo commuters is directed, their every need catered for, and their every desire potentially fulfilled—their ultimate destination, in other words, as well as their time-tabled point of arrival.

Consumer vanguardism

Though badly affected by the long economic downturn, the *terminal depatos* once housed some of the best examples of department-store art galleries in Japan. Anyone visiting Tokyo for the first time during the economic bubble of the 1980s would immediately have become aware that any self-respecting store had to have its own 'culture hall'—whether a modestly sized display area or a more ambitious museum, with full-time curators and professionally organized exhibitions.

Whatever their size, these were nearly always located at the top of the department stores. This was designed to facilitate what the Japanese call the shower effect—the process whereby, once the visitors have been enticed up to see the art-works on the top floor, they can be counted upon to come down to the lower levels to spend their money.⁵ There were few exceptions to this ergonomic rule, and in the rare cases where galleries were located either on the ground floor level of the store or in an adjacent building, the route to the store itself was prominently signposted. How much this 'shower effect' actually contributed to the commercial turnover of the stores is, however, unknown. A substantial number of free entrance tickets to exhibitions were routinely given away in order to encourage people to visit the stores via their galleries. Few statistics exist outside the stores' own private records to allow any conclusions to be drawn on what, if any, commercial benefits accrued from the display of art-works, although an insider estimated that sales increased by some 20 per cent when an exhibition was being held.⁶

But as with other forms of corporate intervention in the art world, direct monetary return is not the businesses' ultimate concern. The true reward of running a gallery is far less tangible but no less real: the enhancement of the patron's social image. One of the most successful examples of this is the Seibu Museum—'the Mecca of Modern Art',

⁵ Interview with Kazuo Yoshida, director of the Tobu Museum, 13 November 1998; see also Millie Creighton, 'Something More: Japanese Department Stores' Marketing of "A Meaningful Human Life", in MacPherson, *Asian Department Stores*, p. 211.

⁶ Interview with Kazuo Yoshida.

according to one critic.⁷ Operated by the Seibu Saison Group and located at its Ikebukuro terminus department store, the Seibu Museum was, when it opened its doors in 1975, the first with its own full-time curatorial staff ever to be run by a department store. So unique was it, indeed, that the Museum was to become the backbone of the group's entire image strategy. Some idea of how crucial this was for the group can be gauged from the fact that its CEO, Tsutsumi Seiji, actually took personal charge of the store's entire publicity department. The reason for this was that the reputation of the Seibu Department Store had suffered a great deal since its opening in 1952—first and foremost because the Ikebukuro district, in northwest Tokyo, along with the area covered by the Seibu Ikebukuro railway lines, were considered working-class backwaters populated predominantly by poorer country people. The floors of the Seibu store were said to be 'spattered with mud from the clogs and straw sandals of lower-class shoppers from the countryside'.⁸

But as far as its exhibitions were concerned, the Seibu Museum of Art was not the sort of institution that sought easy popularity by hosting, for example, Impressionist or Post-Impressionist shows or by concentrating on Western masters. Although it did feature painters such as Degas and Vuillard, it also exhibited works by Kandinsky and Antoni Tàpies as early as 1976, and Max Ernst and Richard Avedon in 1977, not to mention subjects such as 'Hungarian Paintings from the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries' in 1976 and Hundertwasser in 1977.⁹ Despite what one writer described as a 'mad rush of visitors' to see some of its early exhibitions—some 70,000 in the case of the Kandinsky, for example—audiences for these avant-garde shows were understandably small. These were no ordinary gallery-goers, however; they tended to be professional, middle-class opinion-formers, and contributed to the Museum as well as the store by attracting a great deal of attention from the media and general public.

By the mid-70s the store's customers, who had previously been drawn from the immediately adjacent neighbourhoods, now also came from the east and south of Tokyo, transforming it from a predominantly local shop into a truly metropolitan store with a comparatively high-income clientele. This shift was not, of course, a function of the Museum alone. From

⁷ Mita Haruo, 'The Recession and the Future of the Art Museums', *Mainichi Daily News*, 12 March 1999.

⁸ Thomas Havens, *Architects of Affluence: The Tsutsumi Family and the Seibu-Saison Enterprises in Twentieth-Century Japan*, Cambridge, MA 1994, p. 51.

⁹ *The Seibu Museum of Art—Sezon Museum of Art: 1975–1999*, Tokyo 1999.

as early as the late 1960s the store had launched a massive marketing campaign to promote a new image of non-conformist commercial self-confidence.¹⁰ The additional aura of sophisticated intellectualism that the Museum brought to the Ikebukuro *terminal depato* in particular, and to the Seibu Saison Group in general, convinced the group that they should make a long-term commitment to this least profitable part of the business; which they did, for the next twenty-five years. Among the prerequisites for this unlikely marriage between consumerism and the art world were a convergence of widely different interests (the artistic sublime meets the profit motive); a willingness to combine different social and economic codes (tradespeople as cultural critics, gallery-goers as avid shoppers, all under the same roof); and a readiness to dissolve symbolic hierarchies (bringing the highbrow down to the bargain basement, linking money-making to fine art). Fredric Jameson's categorization of culture as 'the very element of consumer society' inevitably springs to mind here.

Conglomerates and colonies

What above all else enabled Japanese department stores, these 'palaces of consumption', to become patrons of culture was their partnership with big media interests. In the West newspaper or TV chains are generally content merely to sponsor art events. Their Japanese counterparts assume a more active role, actually organizing the shows themselves. Although this is not the place to detail the many ways in which media conglomerates in Japan intervene in the arts, it should be noted that they have almost as much experience as department stores in curating art exhibitions and other cultural events. To get some flavour of how significant a role mass-media groups play in the Japanese art world, one need only take the example of the Asahi Newspaper Group—perhaps equivalent to *The Times* of London—which had some eighteen members of staff working directly on the production of thirty exhibitions in 2001, along with another thirty to which the group lent its name as sponsor. Ten years ago, when the Japanese bubble economy was at its height, the Asahi Newspaper Group was associated, in one way or another, with as many as ninety art exhibitions.¹¹

¹⁰ Ueno Chizuko, 'Seibu Department Store and Image Marketing', in MacPherson, *Asian Department Stores*, pp. 182–96.

¹¹ Interview with Kobayashi Toshio, general manager of Asahi Shimbun, on 9 February 2002.

Statistics do not, of course, tell the whole story of media involvement in the arts in Japan. But, as in the West, arts sponsorship by media businesses automatically generates a great deal of publicity. For the department-store museum, joining forces with a big newspaper group not only provides it with a valuable partner to help coordinate exhibitions, but also provides a national platform for the shows' publicity campaigns, as well as furthering the department store's reputation on a wider front. It has thus been normal practice in Japan for an art exhibition to be initiated either by a department-store gallery or by a media group, and for it to open first at a commercial venue before moving to state museums. Collaboration with the state sector, of course, provides further legitimization for the department stores' interventions in the cultural sphere.

In a global economy, the Japanese department-store museum has been exported to the companies' overseas branches, most notably in Asia, where Japan was once the predominant imperial power. Japanese hegemony and influence did not, of course, suddenly vanish with the independence of its former colonies, and what Edward Said termed 'the legacy of connections' still binds some previously conquered territories to Japan. In Taiwan, for example, a Japanese colony for some fifty years, there are numerous branches of Japanese department stores, each with its accompanying 'culture hall'. There are, however, crucial and significant differences. For Japanese consumers, a store might well host an exhibition of Western masterpieces, such as Rembrandt's portrait of his wife from the Karlsruhe Museum, for example. For Taiwanese customers, on the other hand, a 'culture hall' could well be little more than a room where miscellaneous *objets d'art* or bric-a-brac are displayed and sometimes offered for sale. Could it be that their unequal treatment of home and overseas customers reflects some sort of anachronistically colonialist attitude on the part of Japanese corporations? The economic interests of global conglomerates may make it imperative for them to expand their trade into foreign lands, but the profit-making machinery of department stores does not necessarily guarantee that their native cultural mechanisms will be exported on anything like an equitable basis. It may well be that for their Taiwanese customers, Japanese department stores qualify as patrons of culture only in the most token and gestural sense of the term. Perhaps today's economic globalization is bringing with it not the innovative cultural exchanges and inclusivity to

which it professedly aspires, but old cultural habits and an exclusivity more characteristic of the nineteenth century.

Packaging commerce

In the late 1960s Roland Barthes went on a trip to Japan—not, of course, as a tourist ('I am not lovingly gazing toward an Oriental essence', he wrote, 'to me the Orient is a matter of indifference'), but as a student of cultural sign-systems. Japan, he writes, 'merely provid[es] a reserve of features whose manipulation—whose invented interplay—allows me to "entertain" the idea of an unheard-of symbolic system, one altogether detached from our own.' Barthes was impressed above all by the artifice of daily life in Japan, its elaborate etiquette, its preference for surface over depth—in short, by its cultural opacity, its impenetrability for the foreigner. His *Empire of Signs* hardly acknowledges the existence of the political or the economic, but there is one public institution that attracted his critical attention, and brought him as close as he was ever to come to the Japanese department store. In Tokyo, he writes,

The station, a vast organism which houses the big trains, the urban trains, the subway, a department store, and a whole underground commerce—the station gives the district this landmark which, according to certain urbanists, permits the city to signify, to be read. The Japanese station is crossed by a thousand functional trajectories, from the journey to the purchase, from the garment to food: a train can open onto a shoe stall. Dedicated to commerce, to transition, to departure, and yet kept in a unique structure, the station (moreover, is that what this new complex should be called?) is stripped of that sacred character which ordinarily qualifies the major landmarks of our cities: cathedrals, churches, town halls, historic monuments. Here the landmark is entirely prosaic; no doubt the market is also a central site of the Western city, but in Tokyo merchandise is in a sense undone by the station's instability: an incessant departure thwarts its concentration; one might say that it is only the preparatory substance of the package and that the package itself is only the pass, the ticket which permits departure.¹²

Had Barthes seen the art galleries of the railway-terminal department-store complexes at their height, he might have been even more impressed by the multi-functional character of Tokyo's railway stations. At its heart lies the ability to juxtapose, in a complex cultural sign-system whose

¹² Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, New York 1982, pp. 3, 38–9.

signifiers appear alien to Western eyes, what seem to be incompatible or even contradictory entities. Art—to take up Barthes's image—fulfils the function of the wrapping paper: the cultural packaging, in other words, of the consumerist parcel. The process at work is one in which the status of the commercial is enhanced by investing it with the meaning of the cultural. In this sense the Japanese department-store museum can be seen as deepening Barthes's insight, in his well-known study of fashion, that 'meaning is what makes things sell'.¹³

¹³ Roland Barthes, *Système de la mode*, Paris 1967, p. 10.

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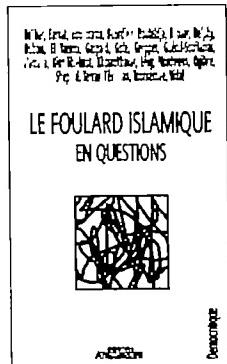
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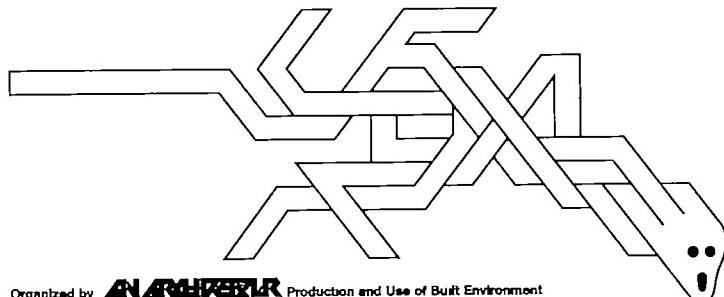
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REVIEWS

Karl Corino, *Robert Musil: Eine Biographie*
Rowohlt: Reinbek bei Hamburg 2003, €78, hardback
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STEFAN JONSSON

A CITIZEN OF KAKANIA

To read Robert Musil is to sense an approaching catastrophe. His narratives spiral downward from the daylight world of bourgeois conventions into the night of madness, the negativity of disorder, criminality and war. Such is the case with Musil's literary debut, *The Confusions of Young Törless* (1906), in which the innocuous rivalry among a group of boarding-school boys builds up to homosexual abuse and sadistic humiliation. In Musil's second book, *Unions* (1911), a woman's promise of matrimonial fidelity activates subconscious processes that drive her to sleep with another man. What matters in these stories is less the manifest content than the finely tuned narrative language, which records how a certain state of affairs is turned into its opposite: the faithful wife becoming an adulteress, the dutiful schoolboy turning into a fascist torturer—but without their noticing when they pass the point of no return.

Crimes without identifiable perpetrators, events without visible cause, historical shifts without agency—Musil's works are inquiries into the multiple determination of human action and social change. In his major work, *The Man Without Qualities* (originally published as *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* with a first volume in 1930, a second in 1932, and the rest left unfinished), the transformation from order to chaos is of world-historical proportions. The novel begins with the launch of the so-called Parallel Campaign by Vienna's political and cultural establishment in 1913. The

Campaign is to culminate in 1918, the sixtieth anniversary of Emperor Franz Joseph's coronation, with a celebration of peace and a demonstration of unity among all the peoples of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. A thousand or so pages later, the idealistic efforts of the Parallel Campaign lead to the outbreak of World War One. As Ulrich, the novel's central protagonist and chief secretary of the Campaign, predicts: 'it's the Millennial War of Religion . . . the War Ministry can sit back and serenely await the next mass catastrophe.'

The first two volumes of *The Man Without Qualities* were met with great acclaim in the early 1930s. The *Times Literary Supplement* noted, with British sobriety: 'When completed, this should be the prose-epic of the Habsburg Monarchy hastening to its decay.' German critics felt that this was not just the book of the year but one of the novels of the century. Karl Corino, in his long-awaited 2,000-page biography of Musil, quotes Bernard Guillemin's review as a typical example of the enthusiasm elicited by Musil's work:

As a critique of culture and contemporary life, [*The Man Without Qualities*] is without example. As a social satire: superior to every model. As a novel of irony: surpassing Anatole France at his best. As an impressionistic novel: one would like to call it the first really successful one. As a psychological novel: equalising throughout the works of Meredith, Henry James and Marcel Proust. As a political novel: the most significant of all. As a study of character: comparable only to Meredith's *The Egotist*. As an ideological novel: the richest and most subtle one we have. As a novel of intelligence: overshadowing Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point*. As a study of apathy and the pathological (Moosbrugger!): outdoing Alfred Döblin's *Alexanderplatz*. As an essay on the philosophy of history: the first one in epic form since Voltaire's *Candide* and even surpassing *Candide*. I could go on like this. But perhaps it suffices to say that if Ulrich, the hero of the novel, is what we could call a man without qualities, then the novel itself is a novel with every quality. It presents us with a great epic-critical summa, which, if we seek a comparison of its totality, can be compared to nothing else than the theological summas of the Mediaeval Era.

The Man Without Qualities is a planet unto itself, beside which all but a handful of novels dwindle. The work provides a comprehensive diagnosis of European culture between 1910 and 1930, whose ideological delusions are revealed, and sanctified ideas and personages mocked, with a ruthlessly satirical spirit. It also relates the prototypical love story of the modern era, as Ulrich and his sister Agathe, in their attempt to flee a social world gone mad, establish an incestuous utopia of intellectual and aesthetic *jouissance*. Following these parallel lines of action, Musil develops highly original reflections—on psychology, philosophy, politics, ideology, history, sexuality, and culture—that can be read as theories in their own right. German and Austrian culture of the late 1920s and the early 1930s produced a series of such encyclopaedic novels: Mann's *The Magic Mountain* (1924), Döblin's

Berlin Alexanderplatz (1929), Broch's *The Sleepwalkers* (1932) and Canetti's *Auto-da-fé* (1935). Next to *The Man Without Qualities*, they seem limited in scope. What Musil sought to achieve was no less than 'the intellectual mastery of the world', as he said in a 1926 interview.

The next mass catastrophe: Musil's hero voices his misgivings in the last chapter of volume two—its title: 'A great event is in the making. But no one has noticed'. The book came out in December 1932. If Musil's irony laid bare the history that had led to World War One, history now had a monstrous irony in store for him. A month after the publication of the second volume—subtitled 'Into the Millennium (The Criminals)'—Hitler came to power, inaugurating the Third, or Thousand-Year, Reich. Musil was living in Berlin at the time. He remained there long enough to witness the Reichstag in flames, to see books of his Jewish and Communist friends being burnt in the street and many of his colleagues harassed and detained. The Nazi state's repression of intellectual life shut down the reception of Musil's novel before it really started, and deprived him of his publisher and sources of income. Musil relocated to Vienna, where he had lived for most of the 1920s. He managed to find himself a new publisher and new patrons willing to support his work. In the spring of 1938, he was correcting the galley proofs of what he planned as the third volume of *The Man Without Qualities*. Again, he was interrupted by Hitler, who on March 15 made his entry into Vienna and incorporated Austria into the German Reich. Musil and his wife moved to Switzerland. They spent their years there in pensions and rented apartments, first in Zurich and then in Geneva, where Musil died from a heart attack in April 1942.

Corino mentions that the streets next door to the Musils' last home were called *Bout du monde* and *Le grand Fin*. In literary terms, Musil had by this point been reduced to virtual anonymity. This was in stark contrast to the intellectual fame enjoyed by his main rival in German letters, Thomas Mann, who spent the larger part of his exile in Pacific Palisades, giving popular radio broadcasts to millions of Germans around the world.

After 1932, Musil's work on his novel was excruciatingly slow. He backtracked; he moved sideways; he tried diagonal leaps; he dug underground connections. On the last day of his life he was still in the midst of writing and rewriting, attempting to clear a path through the versions amassed over the years. He left behind approximately five thousand manuscript pages of finished or half-finished chapters, many of them in different versions but without any sequential order, in addition to cryptic drafts and outlines for the end of the novel. After his death, his widow Martha went to work on the material and destroyed what she considered too private. She then published pieces of the unfinished novel, in an attempt to rescue her husband from oblivion. This posthumous instalment came out in 1943 and sold some

three hundred copies. Martha died in 1949; in spite of her efforts it seemed as though Nazism had destroyed Musil's work forever.

Corino begins his biography with a recent survey among German critics, in which *The Man Without Qualities* was voted the most important work of German literature of the twentieth century. Interest in Musil is increasing everywhere, not least in the English-speaking world. The last decade has brought an excellent new translation of the novel, with substantial selections of the unfinished material (by Sophie Wilkins and Burton Pike); a generous collection of Musil's essays (*Precision and Soul*, translated by David Luft and Pike); and a selection from his *Diaries* (translated by Philip Payne), a misleading title since the texts in question are drawn from Musil's notebooks, in which he drafted stories, took reading notes, jotted down ideas and aphorisms, and reflected on his personal life.

A diary in the traditional sense Musil kept only for short periods—a source of despair for his biographer. This is not the only difficulty Corino has had to surmount. One reason why we have had to wait six decades for the first proper biography of this major world writer is that so few documents have survived. Musil's library, correspondence, personal papers and photographs were all left behind when he fled Vienna, and everything was destroyed by bombing and pillage in 1945. So, too, were the archives of Musil's publisher, Rowohlt in Berlin. Corino's research has thus entailed far more than the usual work in collections and libraries; his task has been the actual compilation of an archive, and he has tracked down material on Musil from the four corners of the earth. In 1988, he produced a massive dossier of texts and images, *Leben und Werk in Bildern und Texten*, which has since become a standard work. The current book digests these and additional documents in an epic chronicle which covers virtually everything that has been said or written, by or about the writer. Corino's work in the biographical realm is comparable to Adolf Frisé's lifelong editorial labour on Musil's manuscripts: thanks to them, we now have an excellent grasp of the daunting scope of Musil's project. Needless to say, this biography will for the foreseeable future remain definitive.

A further reason why Musil has not attracted the biographical imagination may lie in his evasive, even apparently colourless persona—hard to square with the passionate and comical voice that speaks so distinctly in his texts. He looked like an old Imperial civil servant or lawyer. Some of Corino's sources speak of a vain, competitive, arrogant man, convinced that he deserved more credit than he received; others talk of a person whose ironic self-mimicry and intellectual intensity made him the centre of any gathering. Musil, it would seem, lived through the terrors of the first half of the twentieth century like the last specimen of some extinct nobility.

In other words, Corino's Musil seems much like Ulrich, the man without qualities—an impression reinforced by Corino's habit of inserting long passages of the novel as a surrogate account of episodes in Musil's life for which documentary evidence is wanting. This not only invites the suspicion that his portrait of Musil is too influenced by Musil's of Ulrich, but also tempts us to see Musil's protagonist as a badly disguised self-portrait—a temptation that should be resisted, since it vitiates more interesting interpretations of the novel.

In all essentials, however, Corino's biography is an extraordinary one. The scholarship is meticulous, and the book offers a detailed and comprehensive account of the condition of a major intellectual during some of the most turbulent decades of European history. Corino stops short of a new literary interpretation, but he supplies a mass of information on Musil that can only enhance an understanding of his work and its place within the European intellectual tradition. Now that we have Corino's monumental book, it is evident that much that has been written on Musil's work, especially *The Man Without Qualities*, is one-sided, inadequate or short-sighted.

In the standard interpretation, Musil was a writer with a background in the natural sciences, who used literature in an attempt to marry rational reflection with the realm of emotions; *The Man Without Qualities* is, essentially, the result of this experiment. Many commentators have seen Musil's project as trying to bridge the gap between the two cultures, à la C. P. Snow. *The Man Without Qualities* has been presented as an abstract and ahistorical work that seeks to align science and mysticism within some more universal form of knowledge, which many critics have then endeavoured to systematize and summarize. That this is also a novel about World War One, European power struggles, nationalist strife, revolutionary unrest, insanity, incest and the destruction of an Empire, has for long been of secondary importance to Musil scholars.

Corino, too, takes the background in the natural sciences as his point of departure. Musil's maternal grandfather constructed the first railway in continental Europe. Musil's father, a professor at the school of engineering in Brunn (today's Brno in the Czech Republic) contributed to the electrification of Austria. Born in 1880, Robert Musil also trained as an engineer before giving up to do doctoral work in experimental psychology, completing a dissertation on Ernst Mach's theory of knowledge in 1908.

Musil did indeed compare the task of the writer to that of the scientist, seeing art as a 'moral laboratory', and literature as a 'vast experimental station for trying out the best ways of being human'. His aim was to bring a new precision to matters of the soul. This did not mean, however, that he wanted to translate the 'soft' experiences of beauty, love, ecstasy, mysticism, madness, faith, into a conceptual matrix where they would meet the criteria

of rational knowledge. Rather, he aimed to stretch the range of literary language so as to faithfully record the pulsations of instincts and emotions, to reach psychic domains normally expressed only by cries, groans and screams. Above all, this meant inventing a literary style that would serve as an instrument of knowledge in its own right, a style that would reach across all the fragmented and compartmentalized spheres of modern life—not to synthesize them into one all-encompassing totality, but to connect them and to reveal their mutual limitations. This style often operates with simile, opposition or juxtaposition of the most extreme kind. An activity or experience is narrated in an idiom that evokes its very opposite. Comic effect is often generated by rendering everyday matters in a quasi-scientific jargon that both reveals the hopelessly imprecise understanding people have of their own actions and at the same time draws attention to the limits of the language of science. This comical thrust of Musil's style is inseparable from the tragedy it reveals: there is an evolutionary lag between the simplistic ideas through which men and women understand their lives and the enormous potentialities that they embody, but which these ideas prevent them from seeing.

The writer grew up in a cultural environment coloured by Nietzsche's affirmation of Dionysian instincts, by Otto Weininger's sexual mysticism, Stefan George's belief in the mythic sources of inspiration, Emerson's transcendentalism, Simmel's philosophy of life, and Bergson's theory of *l'elan vital*. He shared their interest in the irrational aspects of human experience, but he rejected their quest for the ultimate substance of life. He could not stand the half-baked ideas of 'soul', 'individuality' and 'personality' that saturated the intellectual jargon of his era. Such essences did not exist, Musil argued. The human being is truly a subject without qualities, wholly shaped by the external world. This was for Musil a cause of optimism, for it meant that the human could be transformed. What was needed was a rational reorganization of society.

Musil's imagination was driven by a remarkable power of estrangement which saw both the individual and society as ideological or even fictitious constructs, that could then be dismantled and recombined. Against this background, two ingredients of Musil's life and work take on a new perspective: first, his interest in figures of social marginality—monstrosity, criminality, insanity, barbarism, rebellion; second, his political engagements. Corino gives due attention to both.

The attraction to marginal and pathological figures was symptomatic of Musil's general scepticism toward conventional notions of human character and culturally prescribed behaviour—attitudes which, according to Corino, informed both his work and his life. An only (surviving) child, in his youth he emulated the dandyism of Oscar Wilde or Baudelaire. Although he was

dependent on his parents' money until he was thirty-two, he always refused the affection and loyalty they expected in return. Corino summarizes his situation in 1906, at the age of twenty-six: Musil had already abandoned his engineering career; he was infected with syphilis, caught from prostitutes; he had moved to Berlin together with a working-class girl from Brunn, Hermine Dietz, who died a year later from the transmitted disease, and had started a second relationship with a married woman—and mother of two—Martha Marcovaldi, who later became his wife. And he had just won the praise of the avant-garde and scandalized the bourgeois public with a literary debut about sadistic rites in an upper-class boarding school.

Musil appears to have been strangely free of prejudice, never hesitating to explore the abyss. He was fascinated by the way the violation of taboos—social, sexual, racial, religious—revealed the arbitrary boundaries and exclusion mechanisms through which the polity constitutes itself. The First World War brought Musil direct insight into both human monstrosity and the fragile nature of the national and imperial community. Having served as an officer at the Austrian–Italian front for eighteen months, Musil moved to staff service in 1916. For the rest of the war he worked as an editor of military magazines intended to boost the patriotic spirit of the troops. The Imperial Army consisted of many nationalities and faced a major problem of irredentism as Italian, Czech and Polish troops changed sides and joined their co-nationals fighting the Royal–Imperial forces. The main task of the magazines that Musil edited and wrote for was to prevent such secession. According to Corino, Musil raised the quality of these otherwise lifeless publications to unexpected heights. He was rewarded with the Knight's Cross of the Order of Franz Joseph. Musil's wartime articles—mainly unsigned, and hard to identify—are the least known of all his writings. A selection of those that have been authenticated has been published in Italian, but not in the original German. It is strange that Corino has not ventured any systematic inquiry of his own into this material, since the Great War and its immediate aftermath provided the truly transformative experiences that motivated *The Man Without Qualities* and its investigation of the nature of political passions and historical change.

After the war, Musil continued to hold central political and cultural positions in the new Austrian Republic. He joined the Foreign Ministry's press department in 1918, charged with promoting the incorporation of the truncated Republic into Germany—a programme later prohibited under the treaties of St. Germain and Trianon, but at that time supported by all political parties in both Austria and Germany, on a very different basis to that of Hitler's annexation twenty years later. In 1920, Musil moved to the Ministry of Defence, where he was in charge of the intellectual training of the Officer Corps. In 1923, he was elected deputy chair, after Hugo von Hofmannsthal,

of the Austrian chapter of the German writers' association, a post he held until 1929, doing much to guard left-wing and Jewish intellectuals from the increasingly vitriolic assaults of the new right.

These years of intense cultural and political activity coincide with Musil's most productive period. He wrote essays on a range of critical topics—the experience of the War, nationalism, the idea of Europe, cinema, the task of the intellectual, Oswald Spengler and the decline of the West—that rank among the best diagnoses of inter-war European culture. He completed two plays, both of which failed quite badly just as Brecht was enjoying his first triumphs, and was also a prolific theatre critic. It was at this time, too, that *The Man Without Qualities* began to take shape. At its centre is a hero charged with organizing an ideological programme—the Parallel Campaign—designed to prevent the fragmentation of the Empire into opposing parties and nationalities. In the context of Corino's account, it is impossible to avoid the correspondences between the Parallel Campaign on the one hand, and Musil's own work of political and intellectual organization during the war and the 1920s, on the other. Clearly, the form and meaning of *The Man Without Qualities* were profoundly conditioned by the political struggles and cultural experiments of inter-war Austria and Weimar Germany. The manuscript Musil left behind includes a few chapters about a young socialist intellectual called Schmeisser. Corino cites a letter from Martha Musil which indicates that the young socialist was to replace Ulrich as secretary of the Parallel Campaign. Apparently, one of the possibilities that Musil factored into his political simulation was that the Parallel Campaign should prepare the way not only for the War but also for the revolution that followed it in neighbouring Budapest and Munich.

Musil's explicit political views support such a reading. In the revolutionary turmoil of late 1918, he was part of a socialist cell called the Catacomb. He was a signatory to the leftist programme of the Political Council of Intellectual Workers, which was founded by Musil's friend, the socialist writer Robert Muller, and served briefly as an independent forum and rallying point for Vienna's progressive intellectuals; it demanded the socialization of landed property, confiscation of fortunes above a certain level, the transformation of capitalist firms into workers' collectives, educational reforms and gender equality. It also proposed that a Council of Intellectuals be instituted as an advisory body to the government. Sympathetic to the Bolshevik Revolution, he also praised the achievements of Otto Bauer's Social Democrats, especially the social programmes realized in Vienna under its rule. This was not fellow-travelling of the ordinary sort; the Austro-Marxist ideas of Bauer, Renner and Adler harmonized perfectly with Musil's rational utopianism.

At the same time, he was profoundly uneasy with collective political action and defended the reflective autonomy of the artist and intellectual—in

his shorthand, *Geist*. In the polarized conditions of the 1930s, such positions grew harder to defend. Musil's speech to the Soviet-sponsored Writers' Congress for the Defence of Culture that took place in Paris 1935—in which he spoke of the impossible yet necessary task of defending the creative and critical mind in an age of collectivism—was met with embarrassed disbelief and cold silence. Musil always had a poor sense of *Realpolitik*. Invited as a committed radical, he left with the reputation of being an apolitical writer, if not a reactionary idealist.

Corino does not draw this conclusion, but it would explain Musil's solitary position during the rest of the 1930s—exiled from the community of exiles. It may also account for the peculiar reception of Musil's work in the post-war period. After the Paris Congress, Musil became virtually an untouchable for the official Left. Marxist critics who in the 1950s and 1960s discussed *The Man Without Qualities* often did so in order to dismiss it as a reactionary work, with the exception of Lukács (in 'The Ideology of Modernism'). As a consequence, the reception and resurrection of Musil's work after 1945 became the exclusive privilege of traditional German *Geistesgeschichte*.

Was Musil's stubborn utopianism, his wish to abandon reality in the name of the possible, the reason why he was unable to finish *The Man Without Qualities*? Corino dwells at length on the personal and psychological inhibitions that prevented Musil from completing his work. In the 1920s he had been able to overcome these, thanks in part to the psychotherapeutic treatment he received from his friend Hugo Lukács, a disciple of Alfred Adler, and turned out new work of astonishing quality at a constant, albeit painstakingly slow pace. But he had depended on the financial assistance of his publisher and the monthly donations of his patrons as much as the vibrant literary milieux of Vienna and Berlin to spur his work. Without the pressures and expectations of the reading public, Musil's inner censor was given free rein, casting doubts on everything that left his hand. Corino's biography is a narrative of failure, and he allows Freud's description of Leonardo da Vinci to stand as the final diagnosis:

What interested him in a picture was above all a problem, and behind the first one he saw countless other problems arising, just as he used to in his endless and inexhaustible investigation of nature. He was no longer able to limit his demands, to see the work of art in isolation and to tear it from the wide context to which he knew it belonged. After the most exhausting efforts to bring to expression in it everything which was connected with it in his thoughts, he was forced to abandon it in an unfinished state or to declare that it was incomplete. The artist had once taken the investigator into his service to assist him; now the servant had become stronger and suppressed his master.

The parallel is striking. Yet the conclusion is problematic, for it presupposes a distinction between 'artist' and 'investigator' that Musil would

have found nonsensical. Why give the last word to psychoanalysis? Corino sometimes appears more interested in explaining the difficulties Musil experienced in his writing than in discussing what he actually wrote. Like many other scholars, he is so focused on finding a personal-psychological explanation of Musil's failure to complete *The Man Without Qualities* that he neglects the historical, political and aesthetic significance of the novel's incompleteness—what Maurice Blanchot once called 'the profundity' of Musil's failure. One crucial question posed by Musil's work is the extent to which the novel's aesthetic form can serve as a medium for philosophical investigation, social critique and historical reflection, without ceasing to be a novel. Those who were sceptical of *The Man Without Qualities* when it came out argued that it did not respect the integrity of the aesthetic form, and that reflection replaced narration. Corino remarks, interestingly, that both Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno held this view. Musil is too smart for his own good, Benjamin stated in a letter to Gershom Scholem. Too much thinking and too little narration and character, Adorno wrote to Anton Webern.

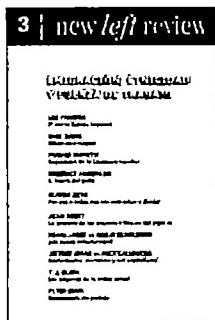
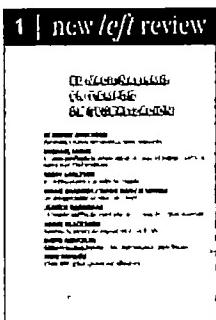
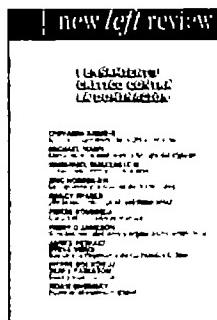
Had Adorno and Benjamin been less unforgiving, they would perhaps have recognized that what Musil lodged in the genre of the novel came close to their own ideas of critical theory (just as Musil also developed his own parallel 'psychoanalysis'). *The Man Without Qualities* is a virtual textbook in the aesthetics of negativity. Few writers have been as skilled as Musil in estranging and relativizing the practices, institutions and ideological fictions that we call reality. No writer has done more to wrest utopia from the eternal realm of dreams and move it into the historical realm of possibility.

Whether *The Man Without Qualities* is a success or failure is a false question, of course, for the answer can only be determined by applying some normative definition of the cognitive or aesthetic functions that a novel is expected to perform. For Musil, the novel was an instrument for taking intellectual possession of the world, a discourse of discourses that could contain all other linguistic registers and rhetorical codes: scientific, colloquial, narrative, religious, political, poetic, social, visionary, sexual, legal and more. In Musil's hands, the genre burst from its own internal pressure—especially as he tried to incorporate the historical changes of the 1930s into his narrative about 1914. The result is textual production of a kind that does not fit into any of the categories that characterize the modern division of intellectual labour. In this sense, there is in German culture only one other project to which it can be compared, Benjamin's *Arcades Project*. Irrespective of the fact that Benjamin's writing does not match the poetic qualities of Musil's narrative, or that Musil came far closer to completing his massive œuvre, their projects stand out in inter-war German culture. Both are idiosyncratic works of absolute originality. Both testify to the dire fate of the exiled writer,

cut off from the context in which his creations made sense. Both revisit the past in order to resurrect forfeited possibilities, inventing a mode of writing that seeks to actualize history as a force in the present. Brutally terminated by World War Two, both projects remain as immense, unfiltered reservoirs of conceptual insights and aesthetic models that writers and intellectuals will continue to tap for a long time to come. Finally, both are now receiving widespread intellectual and critical attention, as though they promised a secret passage, a hidden exit out of an intolerable present in which it is even easier to predict the mass catastrophes, the coming wars of religion, than it was in Musil's time.

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TONY WOOD

VANISHING ACTS

Gordon Matta-Clark is known primarily for his 'building cuts'—geometric lines and sections sliced out of structures slated for demolition—but his practice ranged across almost the entire territory of 70s avant-garde art: from site-specific work to performance, from process art to film. Common to the vast bulk of his œuvre, however, is the notion of impermanence, of things doomed to decay or disappear: trays full of mouldering organic material, meals made entirely of bones, incisions into houses that were soon to be razed. As he himself put it in 1973, his works were 'designed for collapse, failure, absence and memory'.

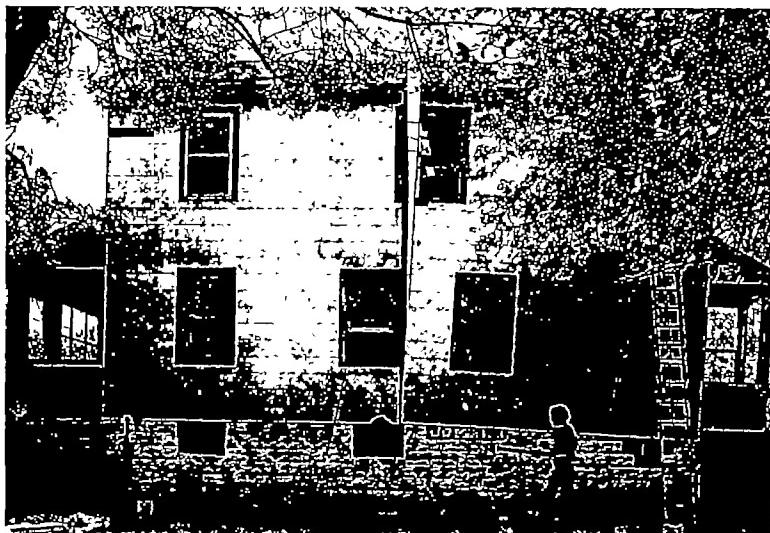
All the more ironic, then, that there has been a resurgence of interest in his work in recent years, when little remains of his output besides photographs, films and the reminiscences of his contemporaries. Since his death in 1978, there have been retrospective exhibitions in Chicago, Valencia, London, Tokyo, Los Angeles, Vienna, Rome and Glasgow—all but one of them in the 1990s. The critical literature on his work has gathered pace, too, with the first scholarly monograph—Pamela Lee's *Object to be Destroyed* (2000)—now followed by Phaidon's lavishly produced volume, notable for the impressive survey by Thomas Crow and the quantity of illustrations and documents reproduced. The book testifies to the variety and dynamism of Matta-Clark's art, the most critical aspects of which have perhaps been overlooked by those (principally architecture students) for whom he has virtually become the object of cult-worship. There are, moreover, few signs that these elements have been absorbed into contemporary practice. Though recent studies have opened up several avenues of interpretation, it is his

insistent engagement with capitalism's spatial contradictions that seems most urgently to speak to the present.

Born in 1943 in New York, Matta-Clark was the son of the Chilean painter Roberto Matta Echaurren, and grew up in the bohemian circles frequented by many of the exiled Surrealists—Duchamp's wife was his godmother, and he was named after Gordon Onslow Ford, the English painter. Though his parents separated only a few months after his birth—and that of his twin brother, Batan—he stayed in contact with his father and often visited him in France and Italy. His fluent French, cosmopolitan upbringing and ability to switch between European and American cultural milieux distinguished him from many of his peers in the New York art scene of the early 70s. Another key difference lay in his training in architecture at Cornell between 1962–68, where he developed a profound aversion to what he termed the 'surface formalism' of his teachers, such as Richard Meier, Peter Eisenman and Michael Graves, members of the 'New York Five'. Here Matta-Clark's ideas resonated, perhaps consciously, with the Surrealists' critique of Le Corbusier. Matta *père* had briefly worked for the latter in Paris, and in 1938 published an article in *Minotaure* arguing for an 'architecture of time', with 'walls like damp sheets which lose their shapes and wed our psychological fears', as a counter to Le Corbusier's rational geometry. But Matta-Clark had less abstract objections to the triumph of the International Style, having witnessed, on the one hand, the use of a debased modernism for mass housing, and on the other the transformation of the Bauhaus's legacy into the architectural vernacular of corporate America.

Matta-Clark's beginnings as an artist lie in some temporary, site-specific pieces executed in Ithaca in the late sixties. An exhibition at Cornell in 1969 provided him with the opportunity to meet several of the key figures in 'Land Art', including Robert Smithson, Richard Long and Robert Morris. The sculptor Dennis Oppenheim was his conduit to the New York gallery scene, where his early contributions—photographs fried and sprinkled with gold leaf, vats of decomposing moulds in agar—clearly resonated with the 'process art' of Richard Serra or Eva Hesse, as well as with Robert Rauschenberg's 'dirt' paintings. Many critics have pointed to the influence of Smithson's attention to entropy, the inevitable decay built into many site-specific pieces. In the present volume, Thomas Crow singles out Matta-Clark's interest in alchemy, an esoteric leaning balanced by a grounding in Lévi-Strauss's structuralism. For Crow, the notion of 'ingredients' can be seen as a 'semantic lynchpin' for Matta-Clark's work as a whole, tying the bubbling vats to the building cuts; in altering the make-up of a house or oozing substance, the artist transposed it to a new location in a fluid system of qualities—open/closed, edible/inedible, static/dynamic.

© Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark, courtesy of David Zwirner



Gordon Matta-Clark, *Splitting*, detail of a work composed of 7 photographs, 1974

Matta-Clark seems, by all accounts, to have been a vital presence in the SoHo art scene; the restaurant—named ‘Food’—he and his then-partner set up in 1971 was not only a rare venue for dining out in a decaying, light-manufacturing area; it was also the venue for countless discussions and performances, including ‘meals’ prepared by guest chefs such as Rauschenberg and Donald Judd. During this period Matta-Clark converted a number of ex-industrial lofts into studios for himself and his colleagues, which provided both income and inspiration for the building cuts that were to make his name. He began to treat architectural space as a malleable object in its own right, a process many saw as a logical extension of the ‘expanded field’ of sculpture announced by Land Art. In 1974 he made *Splitting*, which involved vertically slicing in two a suburban house in Englewood, NJ. He bevelled down the top coursing of the brick foundations on one side, and then lowered that section of the house back onto its now slanted base. The result was an aperture that widened from the bottom up, letting a lance of light in to illuminate the abandoned rooms. Serra, who was among the bus-load of Manhattanites who came to view the piece, saw it as minimalism writ large, a work whose rigour was spoiled when Matta-Clark continued and sliced away the top four corners of the building. John Baldessari, meanwhile, saw it as ‘messy minimalism’ with a surreal element: the dreamlike yielding of solid material to the individual will.

But Matta-Clark's interest in the social dynamics of his site—the structures he chose as emblematic of particular material circumstances and relations—complicates the picture. His political instincts were already manifest in 1971, when he organized a boycott of the São Paulo Biennale in protest at the military dictatorship, trying (unsuccessfully) to set up an alternative event in Allende's Chile. While in Santiago that year, he did a piece in the National Museum of Fine Art—due for structural renovation—that brought daylight to the basement of the building via a series of mirrors and cuts in the walls; Crow aptly describes this as an 'allegory of political redemption'. Back in New York, Matta-Clark's attention had turned to the outlying boroughs that had now been forsaken by the city's authorities. In 1972 he roamed the abandoned housing blocks of the Bronx, cutting sections from the floors and exhibiting the excised material, along with photographs of the space vacated, in downtown galleries. The following year—long before it became a fashionable technique of painting, as in Basquiat or Haring—he exhibited photographs of graffiti on subway trains, along with sections of his car, which he had encouraged inhabitants of the Bronx to decorate with spraypaint. By bringing the traces of his interventions in marginalized areas back to Manhattan, Matta-Clark was signalling the widening gap between the two.

The distance was graphically demonstrated in a 1976 exhibition at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Research. Having proposed a modest building cut, he turned up with photographs of shattered windows in Bronx housing estates, shot out all the venue's windows with an air rifle, and placed the images in the casements. The Institute's director, Peter Eisenman—a former teacher of Matta-Clark's—was enraged, hysterically comparing the act to *Kristallnacht*. But as Crow points out, by immediately ordering the windows to be repaired, Eisenman in effect completed the piece: underscoring the difference between downtown, where broken glass was intolerable even for a few hours, and the Bronx, where such dilapidation was an ongoing, everyday condition.

New York's fiscal crisis had, by the early 70s, led to a withdrawal of basic services from many (mostly black) areas; the works Matta-Clark made from refuse and abandoned car parts under Brooklyn Bridge have more of an edge when examined in this context. At the same time, the de-industrialization of downtown Manhattan, eagerly encouraged by city authorities, facilitated a boom in real-estate speculation. Vastly increased rents could be charged for office space compared to those levied from light industry, which in turn meant the value of such land soared—irrespective of whether the sleek new buildings erected on it were occupied. In 1973 Matta-Clark bought at auction a number of lots that were the leftovers of urban planning, unusable or inaccessible spaces claimed by no one: a stretch of pavement, a slice of

land 95 feet long and 1 foot wide, a weed-choked gully between two houses. The deeds to what he termed *Fake Estates* were then exhibited alongside pictures of these absurd interstitial properties. Though there are echoes here of Ed Ruscha's deadpan photographs of empty Los Angeles lots, Matta-Clark's subject was capitalist development's rejects, rather than its blank canvas; moreover, Matta-Clark did more than document a quirk of the market—by sardonically handing over \$35 at a time, he was actively intervening in it, in order to highlight the absurdity through which it functions.

In 1976 Matta-Clark made a short film entitled *Substrait*, the product of several journeys below the surface of New York. He talked to a range of people—sewage workers, tunnellers, children, a priest—partly as a way of exploring the city's hidden history. But part of the motivation for the project also came from the fact, as he put it, that 'property begins somewhere'; rooting about beneath Manhattan was another way of criticizing the arbitrary nature of possession above it. A more reverent film on subterranean Paris followed in 1977, with unmistakable echoes of Benjamin. In a 1976 interview he referred to his practice as being informed by a 'Marxist hermeneutics', a phrase which he felt captured his works' inward dimension as well as his attention to 'the material dialectics of a real environment'. His buildings cuts, indeed, have a Benjaminian strain to them, since he was dealing above all with obsolescent structures, opening up the hard shell of the outmoded to release its architectonic energies. In 1975 he broke into a warehouse on Lower Manhattan's Pier 52—abandoned with the decline in fortunes of the city's shipping operations, the area was now frequented by S&M cruisers—and made a number of incisions, cutting a channel through the floor and curved forms out of the roof and walls, which allowed an arc of sunlight to traverse the 'basilical' space. Similarly *Office Baroque*, completed in Antwerp in 1977—the title a nod to Rubens, born in the same city—consisted of overlapping semi-circular cuts into the vacated premises of a shipping company on the verge of bankruptcy. Matta-Clark's interventions here underscored the hollowing out of whole forms of economic life, adding elegant spatial voids to areas left behind by capitalism; drawing attention to the absences created at a material level by, as it were, doubling them on the aesthetic plane.

Matta-Clark's aim was, as he put it in an interview of 1976, to 'transform the structure into an act of communication'. But occasionally the message was scrambled or misread. In 1975 he was given two weeks to work on two late seventeenth-century houses abutting the site of the Pompidou Centre. His cuts this time took the form of a cone slanted diagonally upwards, so that passers-by could look through an angled cross-section of several floors, before the optic narrowed to afford a partial glimpse of the skeleton of the Centre looming in the background. The idea was clearly to reveal layers of

history as well as space, cutting through time to unearth a past that was scheduled to become rubble. The piece met with a hostile reception from the Right, but also from the Left: on their front page for 29 November, *L'Humanité* poured scorn on the work as bourgeois indulgence. A more telling point, however, was that Matta-Clark's opening up of brooding pre-industrial spaces played into a latter-day Haussmannite discourse about the need to bring light and air to Les Halles—to hygienically cleanse a working-class area. Matta-Clark was apparently familiar with Guy Debord's film on the life of the *quartier* prior to its razing, but seems not to have seen how his work could be taken as an emblematic endorsement of what he himself termed 'a Gaullist clearing'. He had arguably made another, albeit forgivable, misjudgement in Milan earlier the same year, when he had proposed cutting an 'Arc de Triomphe for the Workers' into a disused factory building being occupied by Communists protesting its demolition—they suggested it instead be converted into a community centre. Matta-Clark's involvement, however, only served to draw the attention of the authorities, who promptly expelled the squatters.

By this stage Matta-Clark had become known above all for his building cuts, but he had continued to work in a variety of modes. His contribution to Documenta 6 in Kassel in 1977 consisted of a vast rope-ladder attached to a factory chimney; in 1976 he painted the words 'Made in America' on the Berlin Wall; among the countless projects he left uncompleted on his death from cancer of the pancreas and liver in August 1978 were several relating to balloon flight. Indeed, though the last piece he completed was a building cut in Chicago, the notion of floating, of liberation from gravity, seems highly pertinent. *Circus-Caribbean Orange* is based on the geometric figure of the sphere, with holes cut not only through the building's various floors, but spiralling sections of 'peel' removed from its walls. Those who walked through the piece speak of a vertiginous dissolution of perspective, as well as of the audience's simultaneous participation in and observation of the work, disrupting the figure/ground relationship.

The dazzling disorientation to which Matta-Clark's works could give rise added a further twist to the problems of site-specificity. Obsolescence was, of course, the precondition for his architectural interventions, meaning that very few people actually experienced the building cuts *in situ*; most critics and audiences have had to make do with photographic or film records. But as Crow remarks, the very virtuosity of Matta-Clark's disruption of space and perspective meant that it became impossible fully to apprehend the pieces on-site. (In *Object to be Destroyed*, Pamela Lee diagnoses this overwhelming experience as an instance of the sublime.) Even for the eye-witness, then, the work 'required its completion in another medium'—making the photographs and films far more than belated, secondary artefacts.

Christian Kravagna divides Matta-Clark's photographs into three provisional categories: documentary records of his working process; deadpan, static images in a more conceptualist mode; and photo-collages. The latter—assembled from scraps of photographic film, held together with coloured tape—repeat the segmented, centrifugal experience of space in his building cuts; even those who objected to his deviation from the dispassionate presentational strategies of conceptualism were impressed—Joseph Kosuth said Matta-Clark 'used a camera like he used a buzz-saw'. It is above all through these breathtaking mediations that Matta-Clark's work has become known, and one can see their attraction (above all for architects used to expressing in two dimensions what they have dreamed in three).

But the formal brilliance of these images—in the absence of the real structures they pictorially reconfigure—has a tendency to reduce the building cuts to dizzying manipulations of space, multiplying perspectives like Piranesi's *Carceri*. The comparison with the Baroque is instructive. Taking his cue from Matta-Clark's photo-collages, Crow argues that the building cuts themselves can be seen as carrying the methods of Cubism out into urban space; once its attacks on pictorial space had been digested, the aesthetic wager of Cubism needed to be carried over into the material world, so that 'a mimetic art could again have something to push against'. The risk here, however, is that the city will in turn become a canvas for the play of forms—absorbing the critical impact of Matta-Clark's building cuts, and converting spatial disruption into frictionless spectacle.

One could argue that an analogous process has been at work in much architecture of the last twenty years, most prominently in the case of Frank Gehry, but also in that of practitioners such as Bernard Tschumi, Daniel Libeskind, Zaha Hadid, Coop Himmelblau or even Rem Koolhaas. Though formally vanguardist and replete with nods to Russian Constructivism, the works of figures such as these have nonetheless proved eminently palatable to multinational capital, to the extent that the warped forms of computer-aided design have all but become franchisable brands—witness Gehry's attempt to transplant his Bilbao behemoth to New York. Matta-Clark was taken up by many architects relatively early on—Gehry even planned to work on a building with him before the artist's death—and the common ground is not hard to identify: vertiginous disarticulations of space, formal disjunctions, irruptions into the urban fabric. But as critics such as Yve-Alain Bois have observed, there is a vast gulf between Matta-Clark's intentions and the purposes of most contemporary architecture. Where the latter has served up show-stopping structures to accompany the march of financialization, Matta-Clark was trying to undermine the cultural prestige of architecture by criticizing its subservience to private interests, and insisting on its systemic destiny as waste.

What of his impact on artistic practice? Many fruitful comparisons could be made between Matta-Clark and his contemporaries—not only those mentioned above, such as Serra or Smithson, but also the ‘institution critique’ of Hans Haacke or the architectural interventions of Michael Asher. Then there are the large-scale site-specific pieces of Christo (with whom Matta-Clark once worked), the practices of Daniel Buren (see NLR 20), and the Situationists. But once we move into the present, the contrasts are revealing. Rachel Whiteread has frequently been mentioned as a parallel, since many of her pieces record absences, providing uncanny reminders of negative space—as, for instance, in her Vienna Holocaust memorial; but the index here has a funereal air, and the traces of the past have no critical purchase. Liam Gillick and Rirkrit Tiravanija, too, are often cited, since both reconfigure space to foster discussion and interaction; but their interventions remain confined to galleries—consigned to the level of the discursive, where Matta-Clark worked on the material fabric of the world.

Indeed, the key difference between his practice and much current work seems to be this resignation to the boundaries of the art world: although Matta-Clark also relied on exhibitions and curators, his object lay outside the art sphere, not only in abandoned buildings in the Bronx or in tunnels under Manhattan, but in the social relations that allocate these spaces different values and destinies. It is not simply because many of his works were scheduled for demolition that he described them as ‘designed for collapse, failure, absence and memory’: they were also located at particular moments in an ongoing historical process: capitalism’s implacable ‘metabolization’, to borrow a term he applied to urban development, of people and places. The critical import of his works resides precisely in their imbrication with impermanence. Perhaps paradoxically, Matta-Clark may owe his current status to his embrace of ephemerality, his tightrope-walk over forgetting. How many now would be brave enough to make such a risk the basis of their art?

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Beverly J. Silver, *Forces of Labor: Workers' Movements and Globalization since 1870*

Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2003, £16.99, paperback
256 pp, 0 521 52077 0

KIM MOODY

WORKERS OF THE WORLD

By now the prospect of reading another 'globalization' book has lost its lustre. The lines of argument are all too familiar. The state, or at least its power to control economic matters, is disappearing as predatory corporations cross borders at will (usually heading South) aided by multilateral agreements and institutions dragging the world's working classes into a 'race to the bottom'. Not quite, says the other side of the debate. There may indeed be a race to the bottom, but the corporations need the state for social damage control, to step up repression of resistance, to negotiate further 'liberalization' and to pump tax dollars into corporate coffers as well as, indirectly, the stock and bond markets of the world. In any case, most mobile capital moves around within the North. What both sides usually agree on is that in either scenario, the organized working class gets weaker. The only question being: is this weakening of labour permanent and irreversible, or is there a role for the international working class in the fight to control or end capitalist globalization? Anyway, isn't globalization, to paraphrase Henry Kissinger, just another word for us dominance?

In *Forces of Labour*, Beverly Silver looks at globalization from a different and original perspective. First of all, it is a longer perspective than most, spanning from 1870 to the mid-1990s. Second, her emphasis is on working-class activity rather than corporate misdeeds or IMF austerity; i.e., on resistance rather than victimization. Third, she challenges the race-to-the-bottom thesis typical of much globalization analysis. She does this not by denying the downward pressure on working-class incomes and conditions produced by capital mobility, but by arguing that as capital moves it does what it has always done: it creates a working class in its new location,

exploits it to the hilt, and almost invariably faces the resistance of that new class. The picture that emerges from *Forces of Labour* is one of a moveable class struggle that both pushes and is pulled by capital's outward trajectory from Europe, North America and Japan to select parts of the Third World, and finally, perhaps, to China, the latest site of rapid accumulation.

What is unique about this work is its focus on working-class activity in its industrial, spatial and temporal aspects. As Silver puts it, 'this book attempts to create a narrative of working-class formation in which events unfold in dynamic time-space'. Examining product cycles and various business strategies for maximizing or recovering profit rates—what she calls 'fixes'—Silver looks at the rise and decline of labour unrest in relation to the locations of different industries over time. Strikes tend to increase as the industry enters its mature phase, roughly the 1870s through the 1930s for textiles and the 1930s through the early 1970s for automobiles, and decline when production becomes standardized. It is in the standardization phase that the industry is likely to begin the trek to lower-wage sites. These new sites of lower-cost production can be within the same country, but typically they rest on the continuing and worsening uneven development that divides North from South.

Silver argues that as capital subjects a largely agricultural and rural population to urbanization, discipline and exploitation, labour—the 'fictitious commodity'—rebels at being treated like one. She distinguishes between two types of resistance. The first, a 'Polanyi shift' based in worker experience in the market, is a pendulum-like swing into resistance which is then mollified by a social compact through government social legislation which, in turn, faces a crisis of profitability and legitimacy. The second she labels a Marx-type shift in which the class develops permanent organizations of resistance: unions and parties. They are not exclusive of one another and often lay the basis of successful resistance, which modifies to some extent the race-to-the-bottom tendency. Silver also has an interesting discussion of how, in forming its resistance, working classes and their various sections 'draw boundaries'. These may be exclusive, as with us craft unions when they formed in the late nineteenth century, or inclusive, as in the case of both Brazil and South Africa, where union links with working-class and poor communities were an essential part of the fight for democracy.

She takes it as axiomatic that each epoch of capitalist development has a paradigmatic industry. For the nineteenth century it was textiles, for the twentieth, automobiles. Both of these industries show the 'innovation, maturity, standardization' product cycle described above. Silver's discussion of the twenty-first century is necessarily more speculative, looking at producer services, education as an industry and the manufacturing of information technology. In addition, Silver has an important discussion

on the role and strategic place of the transportation industry in the production process itself. Particularly in the age of lean production, with its extensive and often international outsourcing of manufacturing combined with Just-In-Time inventories and parts delivery, transportation becomes a key element in the development of working-class militancy. What is missing—oddly, in the era of globalization—is an examination of telecommunications as a site of resistance.

For Silver, the major ‘push’ factor driving industry to the South is increased militancy in the original sites in the North. The time-space unfolding of this exit and entry of capital is measured by the level of strike activity, first in the old sites, particularly Europe and North America, and later in the newer sites of the South, as capital eventually moves on to even cheaper locations. As industries mature, intensified pressure on the workforce brings forth increased militancy and organization. This, in turn, pushes these industries to lower-wage nations where a new class formation begins and the cycle of maturity and resistance is repeated—as it was in South Africa and Brazil, then in South Korea (where the capital involved was mostly indigenous), and now in China, the latest location not only of semiconductor production but of textiles and automobiles as well.

Silver, of course, is not saying what neoclassical economists like to say, namely that all this investment will turn these developing nations into prosperous economies. On the contrary, she makes the point that ‘spatial fixes relocated the social contradictions of mass production (including strong working classes), but they have not relocated the wealth through which high-wage countries historically accommodated those same contradictions’. The North–South income gap has in fact grown, which in turn encourages more spatial fixes and more dislocation between the two hemispheres.

The measuring rod for labour unrest is a database compiled over many years by the World Labour Group with which Silver worked, and which collates ‘mentions’ of strikes in various countries in the *New York Times* and *The Times* of London from 1870 to the mid-1990s. At first this seems a slender reed upon which to base such a lofty theoretical model. The argument for such a database is that these two newspapers represent the centres of the two world hegemonic regions, the one looking West and South, the other East and South, in effect covering the globe. Though she admits that this might leave out many instances of industrial action, Silver argues that their goal has been to examine the relative level of strike activity over time. The database has a global reach, being also divided between the ‘metropolitan’ and ‘colonial and semi-colonial worlds’. The book as a whole, however, rests on a far broader examination of the literature.

Another problem with this measure, as Silver acknowledges, is that it misses other important forms of working-class resistance, such as workplace

actions, community struggles, crucial elections and the occasional revolution. It also leaves out the key questions of organization and politics, revolutionary or reformist. 1905 in Russia is one thing, 1937 in the US another. Does an upsurge produce or strengthen a mass working-class party, as in Brazil in the 1980s? Or does it give rise only to new trade unions, as in the US in the 1930s? Still, the graphs based on the WLC database conform to the recognized major periods of labour upsurge, even if they cannot give us the qualitative picture.

What the WLC database shows is that strike activity rose from 1870, with moderate peaks in the mid-1880s, a larger one in the years just prior to the First World War, reaching an all-time high immediately afterwards; peaking again before and after the Second World War, and then gradually declining in the 1980s to a slump in the 1990s. This is consistent with what we know generally about those periods of labour unrest. When we see the world as split between metropolitan and colonial and semi-colonial nations, however, the patterns are somewhat different. The metropolitan countries follow the world trend, except that the two pre- and post-war spikes are sharper. In the South these peaks are less pronounced, but the post-World War Two one is longer, remaining very high from the 1940s to the 1960s, reflecting labour's role in many national liberation movements. Even in the 1970s and 1980s it stays well above the level in metropolitan countries, no doubt due largely to militancy in South Africa and Brazil. By the 1990s it has collapsed there as well, leaving what looks like a global trough for the present. Silver argues, however, that the capital now accumulating in China has already begun to produce resistance, if little organization so far. Yet what of the rest of the world, including the metropolitan areas from which capital has allegedly fled?

Parts of Silver's analysis do point to new opportunities for labour here. Her discussion of the vulnerability of lean production with its JIT-linked manufacturing and assembly sites points out that strikes in supplier firms can close down an entire corporation in short order, as was the case with several General Motors strikes in the US between 1994 and 1998. Also, her emphasis on transportation as an increasingly essential aspect of production and, indeed, globalization as a whole, is important and provides some strategic insights. When discussing the growth of financial activity as part of OECD GDP from 4 per cent in 1980 to 44 per cent in 1991, she points out that labour militancy resumed after a similar rise in speculation in the late nineteenth century. Finally, as she argues, the period of accord results when capital is able to afford the wages and conditions that buy relative peace in the standardization era. As that erodes, the material basis of the accord dries up. Whether or when conflict returns depends on other factors, of course.

There are, however, some problems with this analysis. First is the emphasis on labour unrest as the major factor driving capital abroad. Surely capitalism's internal dynamics, the recurrent profitability problem that stems from accumulation itself, explains capital's relentless tendency to expand geographically, quite apart from the level of labour unrest? The levels of strike activity during the classic age of imperialism (1873 to 1919) seem too low to explain the European rush for Africa, or America's adventures in the Pacific and the Caribbean. In any case, that acceleration of imperialism did not involve the relocation of existing production so much as investment in very different industries. More likely the panic of 1873 turned European eyes to Africa's natural resources, while that of 1893 sent us warships to pick off the remnants of Spain's decaying empire along with Hawaii and assorted smaller islands. The interwar years, though characterized by intense class conflict in the metropolitan countries, were more a time of economic isolation than globalization. The postwar era fits the theory better, but even there a falling rate of profit is certainly a contender as a relentless 'push' factor.

There is also a problem with the picture that emerges, even though this effect was probably unintended. Silver's emphasis is on the movement of capital outward from the metropolitan to the colonial and semi-colonial nations, though she is careful to point out that the bulk of foreign direct investment is between metropolitan countries. However the impression given by the various bar graphs and descriptions is that capital has not simply expanded the world over, but has virtually vanished from its older sites. This is suggested particularly strongly by her discussion of the automobile industry. Her graph shows labour unrest moving from the us in the 1930s to Europe in the upheaval of 1968–73, and then to Brazil, South Africa, South Korea, and finally to China (with a question mark). While the figures on strike activity may be accurate, the implication is that as militancy moves from one site to another, history and, possibly, the industry concerned comes to a close in the older sites.

In the us this is simply not an accurate picture. The automobile industry remained very big throughout the postwar period. Its workers participated in the 1968–73 upheaval with levels of strike activity equal to or, by some measures, above those of the late 1930s. Auto workers in that era organized sizeable rank-and-file movements, including revolutionary-minded Black caucuses such as DRUM and others in Detroit. While the auto corporations moved out of inner-city plants in key production centres such as Detroit and Flint and accelerated investment abroad, they also invested within the us in the 1970s. In addition, Japanese and European car manufacturers moved into the us, opening several large plants on a non-union basis. As of the late 1990s the us auto industry employed as many production

workers as it did in the late 1970s, when it reached its highest employment level. But the industry had changed, with more non-union plants in the US South, a decline in the proportion of the workforce organized (associational power in Silver's terminology), more outsourcing and union participation in various labour-management co-operation schemes. The political atmosphere had also changed significantly in the 1980s and imports were threatening some jobs. Strike activity slumped, though not to the point of disappearing altogether.

Still, it seems possible that the new plants will be organized eventually and something like a turnaround achieved. In other words, the effect Silver sees in the new production sites of the Third World can be created in the midst of the old sites when investment occurs in a new or old industry. A recent example of this would be the strike at the Nissan plant in northern England, a plant thought to be a bastion of union co-operation and complacency. Despite holding out considerable possibilities for the revival of class struggle, Silver seems to pass over the issue of renewed struggle in the North.

Perhaps a deeper problem with *Forces of Labour* is that it is embedded in hegemony theory. According to this conception, the period of US hegemony in the world economy that followed the Second World War allowed for a social compact between capital and labour in the developed capitalist nations. As this hegemony declined, when faced with growing competition from Japan and Europe, so the social compact broke down first in the US and then in Europe (albeit more slowly) and even Japan. In economic terms, the erosion of US hegemony now appears a temporary phenomenon of the 1970s and 1980s. Of course, the world is a looser collection of nations and a more complex place since the end of the bipolar Cold War, and America's proportion of world trade and investment remains below what now appears as the atypical and brief levels of the 1950s and 1960s. But Japan has faded as an economic power and Europe has yet to achieve the unity and economic cohesion it would require to best the US economy. Of course, Silver is right that the recent 'health' of the US economy rests on an unhealthy foundation. It floats on financialized growth, military spending, falling profit rates (hidden by the financial fix as well as accounting miracles), foreign investment, the weakening of unions and the subsequent fall in real wages, which still remain well below their 1973 level. But hegemony is not about means.

Militarily, the US outstrips the rest of the world combined. And what other nation has an armoured presence on the ground in 130 countries? Its leaders, as we have seen, do not hesitate to use both troops and hardware. This is not just Bush's arrogant rush to perpetual, pre-emptive and unilateral war. Clinton invoked the War Powers Resolution sixty times to send

planes or troops abroad and did so unilaterally in many cases—though care was taken to label these interventions ‘humanitarian’. It is, of course, arguable that all of this imperial aggression is meant precisely to compensate for a real loss of hegemony. But this is to miss two points. Firstly, military hegemony is, tragically, real hegemony—a doomed hegemony, I would argue, but real enough at the moment. In addition, the idea that a nation has to have and maintain a majority of world trade and investment to be hegemonic seems mistaken. Such a position could never be maintained for long. The US remains the economic bull in the world’s china shop. Its military breaks down whatever barriers to trade, investment and energy sources the WTO and IMF cannot. Its internal contradictions, not simply its relative position in the world economy, drive it outward like all imperial powers. With capitalism, enough is never enough.

A further objection to Silver’s theoretical framework concerns the notion of the social compact itself. This idea, the gift of regulation theory, presents the wrong picture of how labour in the developed industrial nations achieved its higher standard of living, namely through economic and political conflict. It also, at least in the case of the United States, misunderstands the motives and behaviour of the American capitalist class in the postwar years. With a handful of exceptions, capital never accepted unions or unionism, nor did it willingly grant the gains made by labour after 1945. Strike levels in the 1950s equalled those of the 1930s, and in the 1960s they exploded in an uncontrollable rebellion of industrial workers alongside the rapid growth of public-sector unions. Furthermore, capital developed union-avoidance strategies during and immediately after the Second World War. These included, among other things: the migration of facilities away from highly unionized urban areas to more rural sites in the South; passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947 (which severely limited union actions); the calculated use of McCarthyism and anti-Communism in general; the open attacks on union workplace power at General Electric and US Steel in the 1950s and in auto, airlines, trucking and elsewhere in the 1960s; and various tough bargaining stances that produced continuous strikes during the whole period of the ‘compact’.

To understand the behavior of US capital in the world today, it is necessary to understand its view toward labour in those best of times. Predatory then, predatory now. The difference is that then capital was still on the defensive from the enormous labour upheaval of the 1930s and 1940s, and faced growing competition in the world from the Soviet Union. In other words, the domestic and global restraints were greater. On the other hand, profitability was higher and international competition much less intense, making concessions possible if not painless. The behaviour of US capital in the 1950s was not a compact or even a truce, but a measured war of position,

to use Gramsci's phrase. There was never any doubt, however, that when the probing missions of the 1950s and 1960s paid off and the balance of forces shifted sufficiently, aggression would follow.

Despite these differences, *Forces of Labour* is a thought-provoking and valuable work which provides an antidote to the victimization themes of so much globalization literature. Its long view is a reminder that globalization is not entirely new, although it is important to understand more recent developments, such as international production systems. More importantly, it reminds us that resistance comes not only from today's confrontations on the streets, but from those who are the system's human commodities, and that corporate power is unlikely to go uncontested by those it exploits.